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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

WRITING AFRICA SPEAKING: ORALITY AND LITERACY IN THE AFRICAN FICTION OF MARGARET LAURENCE

BY

MARIO T. TRONO

A thesis

submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall, 1994

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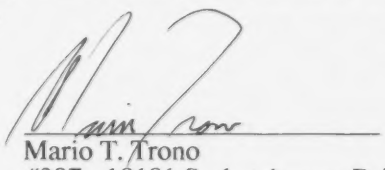

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Kathleen F Read
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DEDICATION

To my family

ABSTRACT

This study draws on a wide range of writings by theorists of orality and literacy to explore the depictions of oral and literate modes of consciousness in the African fiction of Margaret Laurence. The interdisciplinary field of orality studies offers literary critics a wealth of theoretical and anthropological analyses that can greatly aid and facilitate the interpretation of literature that takes as its subject the clash between literate and oral cultures. The argument operates on the assumption that Laurence possessed an informing awareness of the same difficulties involved in cross-cultural cognition that proponents of orality studies have focused and elaborated on over the last two decades. Laurence portrays the struggles faced by oral or illiterate indigenous persons of pre-independence Ghana within the context of a changing and increasingly literate society. The argument shows how the application of theories of orality and literacy can present new and clearer motivations for both the African and European characters, articulate subtle nuances of characterization, and provide a crucial context for the themes of memory, ancestral identification, cultural alienation, cross-cultural relations, and imperialist domination. Space is given to explaining the nature of hierarchies of literacy, and of neo-imperialist efforts to manipulate these structures. The methodology of this study reflects a concern for the tenability of Laurence's efforts to represent the oral within literary constructs, and for current anxieties surrounding recent moves by Western writers to give voice to formerly silenced regions of the world.

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Introduction

Approaching the African Fiction

> He went on speaking to them in terms of one culture, and they continued to hear and interpret his words in terms of quite another. (*The Prophet's Camel Bell* 28)

Critics working in the interdisciplinary field of orality studies articulate the differences between literate and oral thought and culture. Their insights are of invaluable assistance to any critical analyses of fiction by writers that take oral cultures--or more specifically, clashes between oral and literate cultures--as their literary subject. Absent from Laurence criticism is an application of the most recent theories articulating the differences between oral and literate thought to the African texts. This application is necessary because the interaction between oral and literate approaches to human life experience and social organization rests at the very core of *The Tomorrow-Tamer and Other Stories* (1963) and *This Side Jordan* (1960) and is no less prominent in Laurence's autobiographical travelogue, *The Prophet's Camel Bell* (1963), her African criticism, *Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952-1966* (1968), and translation, *A Tree For Poverty: Somali Poetry and Prose* (1954). Since my concern here is with contemporary theories of orality and literacy, and their hermeneutic usefulness as regards the African fiction, I shall focus primarily on the collection of short stories and the novel.

The nature of Laurence's apprenticeship as a writer (for I would agree with the view that her early fictions are, indeed, apprentice works) revolves around a concern for the essence of aural and oral experience, their relationship to literate thought, and the depiction of these phenomena within fictional constructs. Understanding some of the ways in which the human mind processes experience and how these mechanisms vary

from culture to culture constituted the key conceptual bases of Laurence's later handling of the themes of memory and ancestral identification in her Manawaka fiction. The latter have most often been the focus of critical evaluation, their antecedents in the African fiction much less so. Laurence's early placement of African aural/oral experience within the tones of her emerging and markedly Western literary voice (I loosely define "voice" as a rhetorically constructed frame of reference that emphasizes certain thematic elements over others) is a prototypical and progenitorial treatment that would be repeatedly employed in one form or another throughout Laurence's entire body of work. Before Rachel spoke in tongues, before Morag sought to set down--write--her title, Adamo and Kofi were vanquished by the literate economy of the British colonial machine, Nathaniel judged fellow human beings almost solely on the basis of their acquired level of literacy, and Tetteh was compelled by circumstances to learn the language of Western print advertising, bidding a farewell to his traditional oral heritage in the process. Laurence's exploration of the human will to both the oral and the written and the tenacity with which persons cling to familiar ways of interpreting their world took place prior to her Manawakan treatments of memory, of processes of writing fiction and the role of the oral and aural within each. In the preamble to her essay "The Poem and the Spear," Laurence states that writing out of her African experiences was an attempt

> to understand the plight of a tribal people faced with imperialist opposition who do not possess superior values, but who have greater material resources and more efficient weapons of killing. A long time later, this same theme came into my novel, *The Diviners,* in the portions which deal with the Highland clans and with the prairie Métis. (*Heart of A Stranger* 37)

Within the context of the Ghanaian, Somali and Métis struggles against colonial oppression, the efficiency and material resources of the British historically arose out of the fruits of industrial growth and of modern science, both of which were facilitated by the advent of writing in the West. Laurence chose the dynamic interplay between literate British persons and oral or pre-literate Africans to exemplify and illustrate not only cultural and psychological difference, but also the colonizer's will to dictate the forms of

communication by which a colony must operate, forms which facilitate the desired economic and cultural practices. The anthropological qualities of the African fiction arise out of what was essentially field work for Laurence, an examination of radical African otherness in a bid to either identify the universal or articulate difference. The theme and formal characteristics of the short stories and the novel declare--along with Laurence as author, as *scriptor* and figure in literary history--that the oral in mid-century Africa was integral to traditional social organization and thought, was the worthy cousin of literacy that suffered extensive misunderstanding, subjugation, and finally, forced transformation. By bringing oral/literate dissimilitude into high relief, Laurence joins with such notables as Milman Perry, Albert B. Lord, Marshall McLuhan, and Noam Chomsky in proclaiming that the form of human perception and expression is as important as the content--or, to employ McLuhan's aphorism, that the medium is the message.

I do not mean to suggest that the figuring of orality in the African fiction has gone entirely unaddressed until now. In an important 1983 essay entitled "The Other and I," W. H. New observes how aesthetic and emotional tensions in *The Tomorrow-Tamer and Other Stories* are embodied in the linguistic tensions of written and spoken declarations. He remarks on Laurence's simultaneous interest in "Linear historicity and creative orality" (115), and goes on to interpret "The Rain Child" in the light of the oral/literate interface. New correctly states that "African oral literacy and European written literacy...(have) been implicitly--often unconsciously--identified with civilization; often with abrasive results" (115). However, he does not fully acknowledge that it is these "results" which Laurence took as a kind of literary first cause. The dramatic foci of the novel and the stories exist entirely along this cultural rift, a social schism that finds full expression in her portrayls of oral and literate Africans and Europeans. New assumes that there is an *a priori* ground upon which the anthropological articulations of oral/literate difference are common knowledge, a ground which readers of Laurence are familiar with. This is simply not the case, even amongst critics not entirely unfamiliar with this

anthropological terrain. There is widespread use of the term "oral literature," a term that Walter Ong calls "strictly preposterous" since it "embarrassingly...reveals our inability to represent to our own minds a heritage of verbally organized materials except as some variant of writing, even when they have nothing to do with writing at all" (*Orality and Literacy* 11)--the term "literature," after all, comes from the Latin *literatura,* from *litera,* which means letter of the alphabet). New draws his conclusions based on his study of writings that take as their subject this cultural difference, but he does not offer up any part of the anthropological for his readers' own purview. Thus, the exact role that theories of orality and literacy might play in the explication of texts is nebulous.

Most other critics of Laurence frequently draw near this subject but finally direct their critical treatments elsewhere. Craig Tapping has observed how Laurence "is, at the beginning and end of her writing career, concerned with orality and the transmissions of culture beyond and outside books" ("Margaret Laurence and Africa" 70) and he declares that his critical interests regarding Laurence revolve around a particular question: "how is the Africa of Laurence's criticism, translations, travel memoirs, and earliest fictions connected to and the precursor of her Canadian fictions?" (78). For Tapping, the African connection to Manawaka is of primary concern, and although he states that it is a privilege for him to write about Margaret Laurence, "about the newly published literatures and ancient oral systems which she encountered in Africa" (66), he does not discuss such systems, declaring only that understanding of them is essential. Elsewhere, Tapping offers an excellent analysis of the political and theoretical difficulties inherent in Western representations of African orality, and comes much closer to articulating the key aspects of oral thought and expression in specific relation to Laurence's handling of the same material. "Once again," he writes, " the 'underdeveloped' world provides the raw materials for the careers and profits of more technologically advanced master-consumers who import the raw materials (literature) and convert it to their own ends (theory)" ("Voices Off" 74). His own focus, however, tends mostly toward theory and less towards

the "raw materials" that Laurence drew on to create her literature. While anthropological writings can enlighten us as to the nature of these materials, allowing us to trace Laurence's phenomenological influences while in Africa, Tapping directly acknowledges that he is "ignoring anthropological insight" (83).

In *Margaret Laurence: The Long Journey Home,* Patricia Morley claims that both Laurence's African novel and the collection of stories "show Africans and Europeans subject to tremendous psychological pressure as the cultural situations that prevailed for their parents or in their youth undergo rapid changes" (60). But although the psychological changes that take place in an oral culture (one that is forced to learn an abstruse and foreign literacy) are given extensive treatment in the works, the clash of the oral and the literate enters Morley's discussion only incidentally. To be sure, Morley has the right to restrict her discussion to other matters, and she does so, focusing in her chapter "Africa: Catalyst and Crucible" on the broader themes of "strangerhood, exile, bondage, freedom and human dignity" (44). But when, for instance, in *This Side Jordan,* British characters remark disparagingly on Africans' lack of literacy (and Africans either castigate or praise themselves or each other for the acquisition or lack of literate skills) no less than 50 times, when death results in the short stories from miscommunication between persons from oral and literate backgrounds, and when the forms of representation of ideas in both cultures is so frequently alluded to and connected directly with dramatic climaxes throughout both books, "tremendous psychological pressure" should not be merely alluded to and then discarded in favour of traditional thematic analysis. George Woodcock says that *This Side Jordan* remains important because of its "peculiar insights into the changes going on in the outlook of Africans during the 1950s and in their relation to the Europeans" (283-84). He, too, fails to acknowledge the exacting and involved nature of Laurence's portrayals of oral/literate difference, mentioning only that Laurence's handling of "the African tribal consciousness and the European rational and individualized consciousness" is an audacious one. Critics of

Laurence appear unwilling to apply descriptive, non-fictional discussions of African culture to the works, or at least, as in New's case, appear unwilling to cite the sources containing the anthropological theories and data upon which their arguments are based.

A kind of critical circumvention has taken place in this regard, one that in my view is an unfortunate and extreme response to the understandable desire to avoid creating the critical equivalent to what Laurence calls "anthropologically inclined tourist brochures" (*Long Drums* 123), or what in Tapping's view is a

> highly reticulated form (of critical writing) where the author's presence in the text is greatly restricted...(and where) Africa emerges as a mass of data to be categorized and filed under different sub-headings, 'The Landscape', 'The People', 'Outstanding Natural Features', and so on. The eye which 'views' Africa depopulates the landscape with a view to appropriating it for future imperial development. (*Leave the Dead* 26)

The presumed or feigned objectivity and political neutrality that underlie such narratives are markedly advocated by the character of Cameron Sheppard in *This Side Jordan;* this executive of "Allkirk, Moore, and Bright" asserts the view to Johnnie Kestoe when speaking of Euro-African relations that

> There's been entirely too much emotion in our dealings with them in the past, and it's done no one any good. It's essential for our own self-preservation that we should understand them, though, but it must be an objective study, without the personal involvements of hate or love. We can't afford the luxuries of such irrationalities in these lean times. (170)

It is desirable to set aside, in both the realms of public policy and literary criticism, discourses which fail to acknowledge their own assumptions and that, intentionally or otherwise, camouflage economic or cultural exploitation. The project of anthropology itself has been viewed as being in the service of colonialism. But such charges are generally leveled at nineteenth-century anthropological writings which were often clearly tied to "colonial expansion and could provide justification for the 'civilizing' process of colonial peoples" (Grimshaw 38). To dismiss the hermeneutic usefulness of anthropological analyses of African oral culture by writers during the last twenty years--writers who are highly cognizant of the imperialist nature of earlier forms of inquiry--is, I think, irresponsible. Laurence, ever aware of the dangers of white liberal naiveté and the

importance of understanding cultural relativity, acted initially as an anthropologist herself, reading a great many books about "indigenous religions and so on....I had a *great* deal of that kind of stuff" (Sullivan 81). Critics of Laurence should recall the author's stated interest in, and use of, O. Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1950), R. S. Rattray's *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1926, 1954), and J. B. Danquah's *The Akan Doctrine of God* (1944). To be sure, Laurence's early lesson and warning that "People are not oyster shells, to be pried at" (*The Prophet's Camel Bell* 51) should be heeded, and all matters of voice appropriation duly considered. Once that is done, critics should behave as Laurence did and continue to reach out to the cultural other through all means available. These include a thorough consideration of the theories of orality and literacy in relation to the African works. Rather than exploring this varied terrain that offers such a broad context to the fictions, critics continue to remark briefly on the importance of the oral/literate equation in the works, then move quickly away from the anthropological and toward generalized theoretical debates regarding the political tenability of Laurence's claim that she is a third-world novelist, biographical concerns, the Manawaka fiction, or, at best, to a discussion of a single aspect of the oral cultures in the works.

I should say here that although this thesis argues the importance of applying various anthropological insights to Laurence's African fiction, I frequently cite works by writers who may not be, strictly speaking, either literary critics or anthropologists. Both sociology and anthropology have been characterized by nineteenth-century ideas of race and evolution, later by functionalist approaches involving participant observation, structuralist theories based on the writings of Lévi-Strauss, and, most recently, by Marxist and feminist analyses which have quite ousted from the realm of inquiry any residual notions of "rational thought" or "logico-empirical procedures" when such terms are offered in defense of what Jack Goody terms "ethnocentric views...denying that the distinction between non-literate and literate societies has any significant validity" (28).

There is some overlap in subject matter between sociolinguistics and anthropological linguistics, and indeed, between more mainstream sociology and anthropology. Rather than enter into a tangential discussion of the boundaries of various disciplines, I wish simply to remind the reader that I am quoting critics who write while donning various disciplinary hats.

New declares that it is "too simplistic to presume that the contrast between oral tradition and written European culture is an adequate explanation of contemporary life in Ghana" (116). Possibly, this view explains why New and others do not delve into the anthropological (and its relation to the literary) in Laurence's fiction to any extent. I am of the view that Laurence's fiction does not seek to "explain" the totality of Ghanaian "life." If anything, both Laurence and the critics I cite in my first chapter would be highly dubious of any claims to explaining any society fully. Such dynamic and complex systems of human interaction (New calls these "life") defy totalizing, summary, or static explanations. Instead, Laurence's writing repeatedly circles back to (or perhaps more accurately, spirals, moving alternately to and away from a "mystery at the center of being" (*Long Drums* 184), a particular point: that place where different types of human perception encounter and clash with one another upon a political plateau where the personal and the perceptual undeniably dictate the public and the political. As Eric Havelock says, literacy and orality are both social conditions and states of mind (11). The manifold ways in which humans collect and process information and allow norms for behavior to follow from such processes receive extended treatment in Laurence's African fiction. It is this particular feature of African society that remarks poignantly on the general condition of Ghanaian culture in the period just before independence, the feature that Laurence consistently presents to readers as the point at which she/we can *begin* to look at Africa--the aim is not to sum up or describe "life" *per se.* An understanding of both the anthropological and the artistic approaches (or of what Richards calls positivist, materialist, behaviorist and objective discourse on the one hand,

and impressionist, idealist, mentalist, and subjective discourse on the other [27]) to understanding African society as it exists in history and in Laurence is essential. Far from being a pedestrian or "simplistic" exercise, it will at once add a new dimension to traditional, thematic explication of the texts, address the problems inherent in attempts to evoke the oral within the written, and shed light on the possibilities and limitations writers face when seeking to facilitate cross-cultural understanding. A better comprehension of the ways in which Laurence depicts human beings at variance is essential if we are to occupy the informed and empathetic ground she wishes us to or that the formal features of the works demand. To fail in this regard would mean ignoring, to an unsettling extent, the lessons of cultural relativity and human communication that reside in the fiction, and would mean a failure to acknowledge the center around which the salient literary features of the works revolve.

In my first chapter I shall discuss the central ideas of several orality and literacy theorists, stopping periodically to relate them to passages from Laurence's work so that the interpretive utility of the theories may become apparent without abandoning the focused articulation of them within the context of the chapter. Chapters two and three discuss at length *The Tomorrow-Tamer and Other Stories* and*This Side Jordan* respectively. Overall, I seek to develop a workable model that will address the theoretical concerns surrounding Laurence's initially untenable endeavor, namely, her attempts to represent the oral within the written.

Laurence listened to, and learned from, the voices of indigenous populations, heard the articulate accomplishments of the oral cultures she encountered--her ear was open to foreign art and the intricacies of the oral mind. The works entreat the reader to do and be the same, to hear beyond the writing in order to hear Africa speaking.

Chapter One

The Theories and Their Hermeneutic Utility

> Language as culture is thus mediating between me and my own self; between my own self and other selves; between me and nature--language is mediating my very being
>
> --Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Dramatic action in Laurence's African fiction takes place at the point of interaction between characters representing oral, African society and literate, British forces (corporate, administrative, and military). In both the novel and the short stories, disparate psyches, interpreting experience in markedly different ways, clash. As the theorists I cite have shown, reading and writing restructures consciousness, shaping and transforming thought patterns in such a way that cultures without this technology may be seen to possess an approach to phenomenological experience that, when compared with literate societies, is markedly different. To a tremendous extent, Laurence recognized this fact and chose a setting upon which an important historical flash point of contention would play itself out in her work: that moment in time when cultural and economic changes forced Africans to abandon their traditional and distinctly oral ways of thinking. The inexorable advance of literacy is ever manifest in the works and is diligently portrayed. African characters remark on and respond to the introduction of a new semiotic to their culture: the English language is everywhere, in commercial signage and in the proper use by the British of the Queen's English, the latter usually taking the form of a verbal performance used to castigate Africans (implicitly or explicitly) for their poor or "Pidgin" English. Each culture gives offense through the articulation of linguistic difference. The political resides in expression, both in language and in social organization predicated on either literate or oral modes of thought:

> "No," Nathaniel said slowly. "Get out, you. You go 'way. Who want you here? Go 'way, you."

> "So that's how you really talk," Johnnie Kestoe said. "Pidgin English. That's your level. You're no teacher. What's your real job? Stewardboy?" (*This Side Jordan* 222-23);

> Their mother-tongues were different, so they spoke together in English, and Tetteh's speech, as haphazard as ever, made Daniel wonder a little uncomfortably if his own careful precision gave an effect of pomposity. ("The Pure Diamond Man" 182)

African characters prosper or fall into obscurity (many die) according to the level of literacy they have or have not attained. British indifference to the difficulties indigenous persons face in an economy mediated by literacy (a cold insouciance that Laurence was ever at pains to depict) underscores the works' central theme and moral comment: miscommunication prevents knowing the heart of a stranger.

Walter Ong calls writing "a particularly pre-emptive and imperialist activity that tends to assimilate other things to itself" (*OL* 12). David Olson and Nancy Torrance are of the view that "the attitudes to self, knowledge, and society that we in modern times take to be universals in human nature may be seen as products of an evolving literate tradition" (1). Ong discusses the psychodynamics of orality and literacy, and shows how writing restructures consciousness. Without exception, the British characters in the African fiction behave in a manner befitting a literate mindset; their thinking is linear, involving more distinctions within a thought unit (this particular point will be made clearer in the course of this chapter), and their approach to social organization involves the empiricist (and empire-ical) approach to logic, a position entirely predicated on positivist principles. In the modern industrial world "the drive for consciousness is represented as the achievement of clarity, dominance, and power...[the] political ramifications of equating knowledge with power were being enacted in the contemporaneous colonizing of the non-European world" (El Saffar 183). In the following passage from "The Tomorrow-Tamer," the consequences of the British consciousness are powerfully depicted:

> When morning came, the big machines began to uproot the coconut palms in the holy grove beside the river. The village boys, who had been clearing the coarse grass from the river bank, one by one laid down their

> machetes and watched in horrified fascination as the bulldozers assaulted the slender trees. Everyone had thought of the river's being invaded by strangers. But it had never occurred to anyone that Owura's grove would be destroyed. (92-93)

Belief, sacred space, indigenous control over building and landscaping, the vocalized but ignored protestations of the village elders: all are literally and figuratively bulldozed. The mindsets of the African characters that fail to adapt to the demands of the literate economy and culture foisted upon them exhibit a traditional reliance on circular reasoning which involves more distinctions *between* thought units--theirs is aggregative, non-sequential thinking, and their approach to social organization involves ritualistic behavior, formulaic expression, and formulary articulation of history. Most important is the point that oral forms of communication are formed according to the highly contextualized, small, and tightly knit nature of village life: oral forms are inclusionary and interactive while literate ones are exclusive and more generally solitary.

Throughout the work of these and other theorists, and throughout Laurence's African works, the link between practical thought (as shaped by either oral or literate mindsets) and social behavior is ever apparent. The introduction of literacy to an oral culture severs this critical connection. The written codes of British law and economic and cultural practice transmogrify African societies; the African characters are, ontologically, set adrift and are unable to exist in their traditional societies since these are in flux. Africans are just as unable to assume positions within the emerging literate order. Their inability to read and write English (or to do either very well) is what maintains their status as lower-class British subjects whose abject state facilitates the easy removal of their country's resources, or maintains their role as consumers, but not producers, of goods and services in their own economy. African characters who do manage to gain literacy, and thereby gain a foothold in the new economic structure, must do so at a terrible cultural cost: they must utterly sever ties with their traditional oral culture. Nathaniel's rejection of his traditional roots is wide-ranging: he greatly desires to remain in the impersonal

city, a municipal locality predicated on highly literate institutions, such as large, British-run textile firms, schools, city government and courts; he remains committed to the cause of increased literacy and the placement of his students who have, at least partially, absorbed a mostly British curriculum; although he vacillates, his religious leanings are mostly Christian (in the end, Nathaniel's hopes for the future are summarily expressed in a biblical, not an Akan reference, when he addresses his infant son: "Cross Jordan, Joshua"); he maintains his confidence in Western medicine by insisting that his wife give birth in a hospital, and imagines at times courting a woman quite different than his illiterate, superstitious, and traditionally dressed wife--

> a city girl. A girl wise in the rites. Perfume, nylon, knowing laughter. A lovely drunken girl in high heels.
> "No bush-girl for me," he said laughingly. (194)

Nathaniel and Victor Edusei are persons who experience a great deal of pain and anxiety, as it is they who come to perceive the terrifying nexus at which they, and indeed, almost all the African characters in the fiction, become intellectually and culturally transformed. The ontology which pervades Nathaniel's existence is one in which he can neither make the transition to a new culture nor find solace in traditional values:

> "You are young," his uncle said. "Someday you will know where you belong."
> Nathaniel grinned and bitterness welled up in him.
> "I belong between yesterday and today."
> Adjei Boateng smiled also.
> "But that is nowhere."
> "I know," Nathaniel replied. "Yes, I know." (106-7)

While living abroad, Laurence moved between the African/oral and British/literate spheres of existence. So, too, do her characters. It is at this specific juncture, at a position at once grounded in the theoretical, political, anthropological, and the dramatic, that Laurence makes her most scathing indictments of that portion of humanity which will not hear, will not understand the cultural other.

Unlike most members of British expansionary forces in Africa, the author sought a solid understanding of indigenous oral thought and culture. Her success in this regard is

evident in her translation and interpretation of African literature. Cecil A. Abrahams states that both "Margaret Laurence and Chinua Achebe...are deeply influenced by both the objectives and techniques of the oral storyteller" (142), techniques which Laurence went to great lengths to understand. But despite this interest and influence, is Laurence, in her writing, able to bridge the gap between orality and literacy? Can she as a writer, and we as readers of her work, learn of the purely oral, incorporate it into our literate ken by immersing ourselves in the production and consumption of literary fiction? In "Ten Years' Sentences," a short essay on her development as a writer, Margaret Laurence says of her vocation that,

> Sometimes it seems a peculiar way to be spending one's life--a life sentence of sentences, as it were. Or maybe not a life sentence, because one day I won't have any more to say and I hope I'll know when that time comes and have the will power to break a long-standing addiction. (34)

She then says of her comment: "How is that for mixed metaphors?" Here, as in much of her fictional and non-fictional work, Laurence displays the highly literate nature of her thinking, a mode of consciousness contradistinct to the oral-based thought exhibited by members of African oral cultures. In the above quotation, she reasons in a linear fashion, even choosing to view her life as moving along a line like a sentence--for her, life and writing are one. Her attempts to demonstrate, through literary means, the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual chaos of an oral society for which life and writing are *not* one, but are instead painfully separated, may, in one view, appear untenable. Can Laurence's medium accurately convey the mental state of African natives in mid-twentieth century Ghana? In the context of this chapter, I will raise and seek to answer a number of such theoretical questions. While writings on orality and literacy are useful hermeneutic tools in a consideration of the African works, to what extent may the literature be approached as social documentation that may incidentally yield insights into the differences between literate and oral cultures? Laurence gives a convincing portrayal of cultural oppression, but are her fictional constructs convincing because they explore the literacy/orality dynamic or because Laurence has artfully employed standard literary techniques, leaving

the subject--an oral culture--secondary once more to literate interests? Can the experiences, beliefs, and attitudes of an oral culture be accurately depicted when filtered through a literate mindset, written of in a literary manner, and consumed by highly literate readers?

To this last question, I suggest a brief consideration of the fact of music. The aurality of music lies quite outside linguistic structures, but written musical notation allows us, in part, to re-create and consider its features and formal properties, and written discussions of music facilitate conceptual analysis. Composers have critiqued music in purely musical terms through the interpolation of melodic antecedents to their own efforts *into* their own music. But it is, of course, entirely possible to communicate our thoughts on this aural/oral phenomenon in non-musical terms. The very existence of extensive writings on musico-literary relations, on the structural and thematic parallels between literature and music, confirms our confidence in this fact. We are able to turn a melody over in our minds and then express our evaluations and impressions in language, meaningfully and successfully, without having to duplicate the quiddity, the specific "whatness" of the melody that prompted our considerations. Such is the case exactly when a writer seeks to figure the oral voice within the structures of writing. James Joyce's attempts to create a musical simultaneity in his work, a fugue-like quality, represents an earlier effort to translate the experience of the ear to that of the eye. Similarly, Laurence describes (through the literary conventions of fictional writing) the experiences of persons rooted in orality. She does so by incorporating her cross-cultural impressions, gained through careful observation, into her work; she *evokes*-- rather than reproducing with exactitude--the circular, the oral, and the ritualistic through the linear, the literary, and the anthropological. She speaks of one thing in terms of something else, which is, in essence, the very function of metaphor.

Such transposition is the only option for a writer who wishes to take an oral culture as a literary subject. The oral may be studied, its features identified and

explained, but full understanding of an oral mindset is elusive, even if discussion and analysis were to take place in an entirely vocal context. Literate minds cannot really conceive of how purely oral persons--that is, those who have had no contact whatsoever with literate constructs or persons--conceive of their world (this fact is quickly evident in a particular experiment I shall borrow from Ong: for one minute, try to conceive of an elephant without adverting at some point to the idea of the written word, its lexical structure and relation to other lexical structures). Critics and writers of fiction may not be able to articulate *fully* a subject that exists outside the pale of their descriptive mechanisms, but to dismiss or unduly problematize attempts to do so would be irresponsible--it is the very attempt by critics to draw nearer the cultural other that creates the empathetic foundation for the critical reception of works such as Laurence's, fiction that studies the mysteries and complexities of cross-cultural cognition, relations, and understanding.

It is true, nonetheless, that, as Tapping suggests, we run the risk of using "Euro-American ideologies of language and textuality to re-colonize...the newly independent, formerly silenced regions of the world" ("Voices Off" 74). But in my view we chance a greater imperilment if we do not attempt to articulate our impressions of other cultures, of other types of thought and expression, *within our own spheres of influence, using our own forms of traditional expression.* Such preliminary articulations create an empathetic field of reception for not only, as I have said, works by authors such as Laurence, but for raw, genuine, and uninterpreted cultural productions from other countries, whether they be written to produce a change of view in Western society (Achebe) or for an entirely African audience in a native tongue (Ngugi). Attempts to understand foreign cultures, through critical, fictional, or anthropological means should not be deferred because of the impossibility of occupying absolutely the perceptual seat of the other. To accomplish such an occupation would effectively mean to join that culture, perhaps losing a sense of one's own in the process (a kind of reverse imperialism, a bizarre manifestation of white

liberal guilt). We should seek to understand other societies in the same way that Laurence sought to relate with her protagonists, namely, to "feel a deep sense of connection without a total identification which...would prevent a necessary distancing" ("Place" 16).

I shall refer most frequently to the work of Walter Ong. His book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* serves as an excellent introduction to contemporary orality studies, referring not only to his evolving corpus of work but to the work of other major theorists in the field. The basic tenets of orality studies are as follows. As I have already mentioned, there are transformations that take place in human mental and social organization when literacy is first developed in, or introduced to a culture. Even though the human race became literate only very late in its history, it has become quite difficult for literate persons to understand the purely oral mind. What Ong terms a "primary oral culture", a society with no writing of any kind and no contact at all with literate cultures or persons, is itself a type of human consociation which may no longer exist. Critical attention has therefore been focused on understanding the processes by which almost illiterate cultures fare, both presently and in the past, in their transformations to largely literate economies and social institutions.

The cultural productions of primary oral cultures of the past are now considered to be the artistic antecedents to our evolving literate tradition. Before the groundbreaking work of Milman Parry (which, in Ong's terms, proves that "virtually every distinctive feature of Homeric poetry is due to the economy enforced on it by oral methods of composition" [*LO* 21]), a kind of scholarly myopia existed wherein critics believed that syllogistic logic--an approach to reasoning born of the linear nature of reading and writing--was innate, or "natural" to the human condition. Goody argues that there is a direct causal link between writing and logic:

> [The] process of dissection [of information gained through the senses] into abstract categories, when applied not to a particular argument but to the ordering of all the elements of experience into separate areas of intellectual activity, leads to the Greek division of knowledge into autonomous

> cognitive disciplines which has since become universal in Western culture and which is of cardinal importance in differentiating literate and non-literate cultures. (54)

Many early cultural observers considered societies primitive, pre-logical, and retrograde if they had not developed reading and writing. These early critics had not yet understood that literacy only develops in response to certain social conditions. The nomadic tribes of Somalia did not develop writing as there was no sedentary economic activity which the majority of the population could adopt, one that could justify the creation and storage of written records--nomadic persons could not transport and keep with them libraries of written records and literature. Laurence, speaking as both literary critic and anthropologist, tells us in *A Tree For Poverty: Somali Poetry and Prose* that

> Folk-literature...is easily portable, since it is carried only in the memory of the people. This last point is an important one for a nomadic race, since the Somali tribes are constantly moving their dwelling-places....It is almost inevitable, then, that literature should be the cultural medium of the Somali people. (2)

Knowledge, custom, law, all had to be orally transmitted repeatedly in order to remain in existence. Far from presenting a problem, these demands did not result in poor communication; what in *This Side Jordan* Bedford insultingly calls "bush telegraph" (6--he grudgingly concedes its efficiency) I. M. Lewis calls "Rapid and highly effective oral communication" (268). Oral cultures were, in fact, well and properly adapted to their circumstances. Yet their development was considered to be arrested and their oral art forms were undervalued, not given serious consideration until written down. As Ong states, written "texts have clamored for attention so peremptorily that oral creations have tended to be regarded generally as variants of written production or, if not this, as beneath serious scholarly attention" (*OL* 8).

Ong's close study of what he appropriately terms the psychodynamics of orality helps in creating for us a profile of possible attitudes a member of an oral culture might hold, a kind of oral "Everyman" against which Laurence's African characters may be contrasted and compared. Such a model may be superimposed upon the fiction in an

attempt to understand better the reasons for acts carried out by the characters. Why does Adamo hear voices (is it a literal or figurative hearing?), and why does he find such solace in the simple, daily routines of British military life? What does Tetteh's declamation--that he is a "believer in signs"--tell us about the changes he has undergone in order to become financially successful? Why does Kofi desperately need to hear it spoken aloud by a member of the British work crews that he is a "bridgeman"? Answers to these questions (which I shall make more explicit in the second and third chapters) lie in understanding the thought processes members of oral cultures use in understanding and responding to their world.

Ong tells us that

> All thought, including that in primary oral cultures, is to some degree analytic: it breaks its materials into various components. But abstractly sequential, classificatory, explanatory examination of phenomena or of stated truths is impossible without writing and reading. Human beings in primary oral cultures, those untouched by writing in any form, learn a great deal and possess and practice great wisdom, but they do not 'study.' (9)

Instead, Ong goes on to say, "They learn by apprenticeship." Solitary analysis of written records is not an option for these groups--ideas and accepted norms for behavior must reside in the realm of daily human interaction, within the immediate demands of economic and social exigency. The oral memory of both the collective and the individual must preserve, first and foremost, social custom, law, genealogies, and practical "working" information. Readers of Laurence and

> persons whose world view has been formed by high literacy need to remind themselves that in functionally oral cultures the past is not felt as an itemized terrain, peppered with verifiable and disputed "facts" or bits of information. It is the domain of the ancestors, a resonant source for renewing awareness of present existence, which itself is not itemized terrain either. Orality knows no lists or charts or figures. (98)

Verbal repetition of proverbs and other formulary techniques must be tirelessly maintained. As a result, oral cultures possess only a few thousand words and practitioners have little or no recourse to etymology. By contrast, the English language has over a million and a half words with present and past meanings available to readers.

Memory in oral cultures may be maintained only by repetition and by the thinking of, to put it simply, memorable thoughts. This is why oral art forms may seem extremely repetitious and dramatically insincere; effusive praise and castigation, and common phrases which may initially appear as clichés to literate ears, serve to give this impression. They only seem repetitive or cliché when the dynamic forms are poured into the foreign molds of Western literary and linguistic constructs--such is the difficulty involved in understanding another culture on its own terms when recourse to your own culture's norms are your only means of orientation. Even the perennially cautious Laurence errs when speaking of Somali oral poetry. She is guilty of failing to hammer out, with semantic exactitude, the strictly oxymoronic phrase "oral literature," which, as I have said, Ong calls "preposterous", revealing "our inability to represent to our own minds a heritage of verbally organized materials except as some variant of writing, even when they have nothing to do with writing at all" (*OL* 11). However, the term has recently gained valid currency. As Tapping has noted ("Voices" 75), Ngugi wa Thiong'o uses the phrase to describe cultural production which is entirely literary and which draws on oral antecedents in some way (whether that is, in the case of his own writing, to describe the oral performances and pre-literate qualities of his childhood home or to seek in some way to introduce the circular structures of oral expression and reasoning into a literary construct).

> Ong notes that in *No Longer At Ease* Chinua Achebe
>
> > draws directly on Ibo oral tradition in West Africa...[and provides] abundant instances of thought patterns of orally educated characters who move in these oral, mnemonically tooled grooves, as the speakers reflect, with high intelligence and sophistication, on the situations in which they find themselves involved. (35)

Laurence was intrigued by the intricacies and the difficulties involved in arriving at a level of understanding that was informed and empathetic but not appropriative or imperialist. She agonized over her own status within African culture as visitor and unofficial cultural ambassador, over the nature of acerbic African responses to her efforts

that she claims were "aimed at my white liberalism" (*Heart* 28), and primarily, over how she might represent a foreign mind in transition from one mode of thought and culture to another. The result was African characters created out of the psychological minutiae she was able to observe and understand. Like Ong, she sees the oral person from her own Western perspective but within the context of painstakingly gathered and considered observations--the writings of one serve to illuminate the other. Laurence neither evokes her own oral past (for her upbringing was strictly literate) nor incorporates the structures of oral thought and expression into her own work. Rather, she sets up for the reader the African experience *as understood by interlopers such as herself,* as part of her own development and recounted through means that carry currency in her own tribe.

Ong articulates nine key characteristics and differences between oral and literate thought and expression (37-50). The essentially oral is, first, *additive rather than subordinative.* Ong cites the creation narrative in Genesis 1:1-5 (the Douay version of 1610 which was "produced in a culture with a still massive oral residue" [37]) as an oral narration wherein nine introductory "ands" serve as the main connectives. In later translations connectives such as "when," "then," "thus," and "while" are introduced "to provide a flow of narration with the analytic, reasoned subordination that characterizes writing." In a literate culture, the demands of written expression (demands learned early in formal scholastic settings) ever impinge upon speakers and the content of their expressions--persons can carry around to far-away destinations the ability to write a business letter or a plan for building bridges. In an oral culture, expression is designed to facilitate convenience for speakers in immediate social settings, or "the full existential contexts which surround oral discourse" (38). In such settings, when context for a discussion is clearly established, formulaic means of communication such as proverbs multiply, are added on and on in layers, and meaning emerges from what appears to be excess and repetition, when in fact, the language is simply not structured so that one may quickly "come to the point." To do so would be considered a rudeness as is the case in

"The Tomorrow-Tamer" when Badu the clerk, speaking as a member of the British work group, brusquely and briefly calls out the basic manner in which to apply for work on the bridge. After a brief statement, he ceases to converse--the tribe is outraged by his flagrant violation of appropriateness conditions. (I shall discuss this specific example at length in my second chapter.) The additive nature of oral expression results in rules of behavior that, within the context of colonial occupation, are difficult to maintain--the predominant language of human interaction in Ghana soon becomes the clipped and subordinative speech of the British.

Second, the oral is *aggregative rather than analytic.* Epithets around which conventional ideas are clustered aid memory and help facillitate spoken discourse. Ong cites examples from several cultures: "the brave soldier," "capitalist war-mongers," and "the Glorious Revolution of October 26" (38-39) are all formulary constructs designed to totalize or maintain groups of ideas. The device is a necessary one as there is no recourse to a writing system wherein an analytic approach that breaks down rather than builds up can be afforded. High literacy has viewed such epithets as awkward and tiresome clichés, since they resemble low literate expression, even though the epithets may function orally in concert to express complex ideas. In the city of Accra, Nathaniel is ashamed of his traditional language. It is only inside his home that Nathaniel would dare enter into a traditional exchange of proverbs:

> "You could work there," Adua replied. This Accra, Nathaniel, it is no good."
> "What is wrong with it? Can you tell me?"
> " 'It is hard to meet a good man in a big city.' "
> He remembered the proverb from long ago. But he knew how to counter it.
> " 'Where you have had joy is better than where you were born,' " he replied.
> It was another proverb. (72)

In the above exchange, Adua, who argues in a purely traditional manner, is unable to respond to Nathaniel's interrogative in a conversation characterized by broken down and highly differentiated analytic segments--a Western-style, point-form disputation is not an

option. The formulary phrases encapsulate broader ideas in short phrases which are simply easier to remember. It is illuminating to contrast any of the markedly traditional African conversations that take place in the works with those had by the British in private. In *This Side Jordan*, James Thayer and company hold court at "The Club":

> "The province of Ashanti contains almost all the country's wealth...Cocoa, gold, timber. No wonder they don't want to be governed by a political party dominated by coast men. And of course the C. P. P.'s death on the chiefs and the old traditions, and that's got the Ashantis raging, too." (141)

In his discussion on the consequences of literacy, Jack Goody notes Nietzsche's description of "we moderns" as "wandering encyclopedias" (58). As James Thayer's words show, British discourse is highly subordinative and analytic, straying from any memorable foci to enter the free play of an almost encyclopedic stringing together of facts, the whole of which may only be interpreted and understood by a fellow high literate.

Third, oral expression and thought are more *redundant or copious* than literate forms. Ong makes the important point that "writing establishes in the text a 'line' of continuity outside the mind" (39). As a person reads, the context of an idea can ever be retrieved by selectively scanning back over the text. The mind may move ahead analytically because of this convenient recourse. As you, the reader of this thesis, read my second and third chapters, you may refer at any time to the theories set down here in the first. In oral states of mind, the situation is very different--there is nothing to refer to outside the mind, for the oral utterance disappears at the moment of its sounding. Therefore, in oral discourse, the context for an expression must repeatedly be evoked in order to maintain relevance and continuity. Oral speaking is entirely circular, ever complete within itself, rolling ball-like toward desired conclusions, while literate expression may begin and end in tangential forays and commentaries flung far from the contextual point of departure.

Ong raises the important point that "persons who have interiorized writing not only write but also speak literately, which is to say they organize, to varying degrees, even their oral expression in thought patterns and verbal structures they would not know unless they could write" (56-57). When British characters in the fiction are engaged in verbal conversation with Africans, they are in no way approaching a level playing field. In fact, the inverse is the case. Throughout the novel and several of the short stories, it is during conversations between the two cultures that oral and literate differences come into high relief, creating as they do so the tensions of racial conflict.

Ong's fourth point involves the fact that

> Since in a primary oral culture conceptualized knowledge that is not repeated aloud soon vanishes, oral societies must invest great energy in saying over and over again what has been learned arduously over the ages. This need establishes a highly *traditionalist or conservative* set of mind that with good reason inhibits intellectual experimentation. (41, my italics)

In oral societies, elders and chiefs are revered as valuable repositories for the sum total of cultural law, custom, belief and history. With the advent of literacy and the concomitant creation of written history, legal precedent, and religious and social tracts, the figures of the wise old man and woman disappear. Nowhere in the fiction is this change more apparent than in "The Tomorrow-Tamer" when Kofi becomes fascinated by the British bridge builders, with their technology and power both born of the technological advancements that accompany literacy. Before the arrival of the men, Kofi used to listen each evening to his grandmother repeat her genealogy, but one night, as Kofi goes to socialize yet again with the workers, "It was only when he was halfway to the *Hail Mary* that he realized he had forgotten to greet or say farewell to the grandmother who sat, blind and small, in the darkened hut, repeating in her far-off voice the names of the dead" (96). The elders of Kofi's village display the traditional or conservative mindset so essential to preserving oral memory; they cannot incorporate through experimentation the demands of the British information-based economy. The only practical response to an irresistible, social and economic force is an abandonment of traditional thought in favour

of literacy, a jump which, this paper argues, is highly problematic due to the very different natures of each mode of thinking.

Fifth, oral thought and expression resides very close to what Ong terms the *human lifeworld*. Oral knowledge must be conceptualized and verbalized in close relation to tangible and immediate daily experience, wrapped in and around the pleasures and exigencies of life. Ong states that

> A chirographic (writing) culture and even more a typographic (print) culture can distance and in a way denature even the human, itemizing such things as the names of leaders and political divisions in an abstract, neutral list entirely devoid of a human action context. (42)

Oral cultures have no trade manuals, no written studies of approaches to farming or building. All such information is learned through purely oral and hands-on apprenticeship. Such is the nature of Adamo's life as a very young man, prior to the advent of disease and death in his village:

> when Adamo was no longer a child, his father taught him what he must know to wrench existence from the forest and yet not turn to vengeance the spirit that animated all things--the tree he felled, the plant he harvested, the antelope whose life he must take to feed his own. The forbidden acts and words were many, but Adamo dared not forget, for an offender endangered not only himself but the entire village, and that was the worst any person could do. (206)

Adamo exists here close to the human lifeworld, solidly within the dictates and lifestyle of a primary oral culture. It is highly significant that his fate is sealed and his demise imminent when Major Appiah hands Adamo his discharge papers, the highly impersonalized and abstracted official document that at once dismisses, thanks, and banishes Adamo, whose only response at the time to say "I beg you, sah--what dis t'ing?" (221). Full realization of what has happened is only available to him when Appiah speaks to him "in Adamo's own language."

In explaining his sixth distinction, Ong states that

> oral or residually oral cultures strike literates as extraordinarily agonistic *in their verbal performance and indeed in their lifestyle.* Writing fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings struggle with one another. It separates the knower from the known. By

> keeping knowledge embedded in the human lifeworld, orality situates knowledge within a context of struggle. (43-44, my italics)

Further to this, "Proverbs and riddles are not used simply to store knowledge but to engage others in verbal and intellectual combat" (44). Ong states that at points in the *Iliad* and*Beowulf,* in many African stories such as *The Mwindo Epic*, in the Bible and (in a non-literary context) amongst illiterate black males throughout the United States, reciprocal name-calling in an apposite or contradictory tone is common. What sounds to literate persons like fulsome and exaggerated praise is also evident in oral cultures. Ong notes that literary narrative "pulls the focus of action more and more to interior crises and away from purely exterior crises." This is precisely the case with Laurence's writing, with "The Voices of Adamo" in particular. The oral is not at all duplicated; if it were, each of these nine distinctions might characterize the writing itself. Instead, these distinctions characterize the context for the writing. The work is not agonistically toned, but is, instead, made subtle and interior by the processes of symbol, metaphor, and metonymy. Were Adamo's story told in a purely oral setting, the telling would take place in a purely existential context, close to the human lifeworld, and would be told in order to illuminate ideas that would bear directly on the individual's place within society. Agonistic or extreme tones struck early observers as evidence of the savage within indigenous societies when, in fact, expression was closely linked to the demands of oral expression. Laurence was able to perceive the subtleties of thought and the shrewdness of expression that flowed beneath the polemical vitriolic she encountered. In *This Side Jordan,* Nathaniel moves between a literate world of polite (though by no means morally superior or unthreatening) forms, and an oral world of visceral, heated exchange. Ironically, it is the former which becomes the expression of a particular brand of desperate and insecure British self-exiles who

> were so desperately uncertain of their own worth and their ability to cope within their own societies that they were forced to seek some kind of mastery in a place where all the cards were stacked in their favour and where they could live in a self-generated glory by transferring all evils, all weaknesses, onto another people. (*The Prophet's Camel Bell* 226-27)

Kwabena's scathing denunciations of Matthew's imperialist perspectives in "The Drummer of All the World," =Danso's verbal confrontations with Brother Lemon in "The Merchant of Heaven," and Mammii Ama's alternately gay and serious outcries in "A Gourdful of Glory" are all instances of agonistic expression that Laurence uses to create an accurate and highly revealing characterization of the oral mindset.

Seventh, Ong sees oral thought and expression as *empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced.* While the oral seeks communal identification with the familiar, "Writing separates the knower from the known and thus sets up conditions for 'objectivity', in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing" (46). Eighth, he describes oral societies as being *homeostatic,* explaining that, to quote Goody, "What continues to be of social relevance is stored in the memory while the rest is usually forgotten: and language--primarily vocabulary--is the effective medium of this crucial process" (31). Quite simply, oral cultures speak and remember only that which has an application to the present. History, in the Western sense of the term, does not exist. Not surprisingly then, Ong's ninth and final distinction involves the fact that oral thought is always more *situational than abstract.* Persons of an oral mindset are highly distrustful of syllogistic reasoning, of conclusions that arise out of premises abstractly laid out. Why reason within the realm of the abstract when perceptual consultation with the "real world" is infinitely more satisfying and offers solid confirmation of any theories or hunches about the way things are? Goody's analysis is pertinent here:

> as Plato argued, the effects of reading are intrinsically less deep and permanent than those of oral converse; but also because the abstractness of the syllogism and of the Aristotelian categorizations of knowledge do not correspond very directly with common experience. The abstractness of the syllogism, for example, of its very nature disregards the individual's social experience and immediate personal context; and the compartmentalization of knowledge similarly restricts the kinds of connections which the individual can establish and ratify with the natural and social world. (60)

Members of oral cultures introduced to literacy, to abstract, syllogistic problems, such as "Precious metals do not rust/Gold is a precious metal/Does it rust or not?", feel that such

mental exercises trivialize a reality that is best discovered through tactile, olfactory, and auditory senses.

Throughout all of the African works there are depictions and characterizations of African persons who either display such attitudes, or, if newly literate, offer "school-room answers," as Ong calls them (51), with a great deal of indifference. In *This Side Jordan*, the students of Futura Academy are not, as the Europeans suggest, behaving in an audacious and selfish manner when they expect placement in a British firm to lead quickly to promotions and perks. They simply believe that if a thing--literacy--has value, the rewards or advantages will be readily forthcoming. The students, Kumi and Awuletey, who bribe Nathaniel do not share their highly literate teacher's anxiety over the "goods for influence" arrangement. Schools such as Jacob Abraham Mensah's "academy" promise, in letters and language on the plaque outside, that "Ghana. The future is YOURS" (21), if only one attends and becomes semi-literate. However, it is not explained to them that unspoken rules pervade the British world of literacy, and that not only formal learning but the jobs that one enters into after graduation as well are gained by entering a corporate salmon-run where unarticulated rules of behavior and qualification govern one's rise.

Throughout the novel, Nathaniel is tortured by these rules, assessing and re-assessing his performance with Europeans after each encounter. Ironically, within the context of the British firm, bribery takes place in a sense as well. Cameron Sheppard offers (though almost in code) early promotion to Johnnie Kestoe if Johnnie attests to his co-workers' work habits and political orientations. The arrangement strikes the reader as highly immoral, especially when compared to the students' bribe. The latter appears understandable given the norms governing exchange in the African culture of the day--Johnnie's decision to act as informant is then, as now, morally reprehensible. But within the context of this discussion of literacy and orality the key difference between the two is

that the Europeans are concerned with exchange of information rather than goods--the flow of information controls the flow of goods and currency.

I shall refer to only one other work by Ong, his fourth chapter in *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* entitled "African Talking Drums and Oral Noetics." Here, Ong discusses the talking drums of sub-Saharan Africa and how they metamorphose oral processes in unique ways. The talking drums or slit-gongs are "the most highly developed speech surrogates known anywhere in the world" (93), and represent a deviation from oral language that is quite opposite to the move toward chirographic or typographic culture. Laurence incorporates this feature of African life as a motif throughout the fiction. By evoking (not duplicating) the rhythm and tone of a form of expression so much closer to musical than to literary expression, the reader is reminded that African society arises out of a different past, a past that hovers, like the traditional drummers, at the fringes of the literate city, beating out a protest--at once filled with fire and a dirge-like plaintive quality--against alien forms of expression. In "The Drummer of All the World," the idea of cultural relativity is introduced through Matthew's belief, then disbelief, in the drum god. Adamo finds solace within the ritualized drum corp of the British military because the sounding of the drum was the only aural link he could find between his past and present. The European rape of Africa (symbolized primarily in Johnnie Kestoe's using of the African prostitute Emerald and in Matthew's taking of Afua) also finds expression in the transformation of drums from their traditional, communicative and artistic use to a bawdy accompaniment to high-life dancing in nightclubs (places that Africans such as Adamo and Nathaniel find repulsive and where Lamptey parades his prostitutes for Africans and Europeans alike). I will comment more extensively on the function of drums in Laurence's fiction in the following chapters.

According to Ong, "The sophisticated drum languages of Africa have been developed within an oral economy of thought and expression...drums exemplify and often

informingly exaggerate the characteristics of the oral lifeworld, or of primary orality" (*Interfaces* 95-96). The English language, unlike most African languages, is not tonal. Our tongues sometime employ tone or pitch to differentiate between possible variations in phrase meaning (compare, for instance, "I am *tired?*" and "I *am* tired."), but African words that would be otherwise homonymic are distinguished between by the employment of tone. African talking drums replicate the tones of whole words, focusing less on individual vowels and consonants. The African drums may better be described as wooden or slit-gongs--wooden constructions that vibrate and resonate sound when struck. The aural difference between male and female voice is at the heart of this form of tonal communication. High tones are considered "female" or weaker, while low tones are "male" or stronger. Interestingly, the drum language--which operates essentially through the contrasting of two differently pitched tones--may be "spoken" through the employment of any device capable of approximating the recognizable tone frequencies. While in western cultures there developed the written word as an efficacious adjunct to purely oral communication, African cultures developed a speech surrogate that remained closely linked to the experience of the ear rather than the eye. Context and accumulation of phrasings in a drummed communication disambiguate particular words. This fact, in conjunction with the formulaic nature of many noun phrases ("war which calls attention to ambushes" is a substitute for "war") makes it so that it takes roughly eight times longer to say something on a drum than in a spoken word language. It is interesting to note that "the drummers think of [drum talk] as consisting not of tones but of words represented by tones" (101). The tonal language is not considered abstract, and is therefore in no way similar to written language.

In his essay entitled "Rational thought in Oral Culture and Literate Decontextualization," J. Peter Denny claims that Western thought possesses a particular property that sets it off from agricultural and hunter-gatherer societies. Decontextualization, as he terms it, takes place when thought processes foreground

certain information while backgrounding or disconnecting other information. He cites the literate child's early understanding of geometric shapes as separate things, not as a plate or a moon, but a circle--an abstraction. Children from pre-literate societies would find little meaning in such shapes that exist so far from the real-life world. Denny offers a general theory of cross-cultural cognition wherein he employs two variables, differentiation and contextualization. "Higher differentiation is making more distinctions *within* a thought unit, whereas higher contextualization...is making more connections to *other* thought units" (66). Both agricultural and hunter-gatherer societies (groups where "thought has to be employed not just to gain a living but also to support the social structure" [70]) are characterized by low differentiation and high contextualization. A member of such a society would not view the world in terms familiar to Western forms of logic; syllogisms involving the respective arrival times of hypothetical trains A and B would be ignored by, or would not occur, to aboriginals. Instead, how real and tangible trains affect the local economy, whether they transport friend or foe, kill livestock by accident or wake children in the middle of the night would supply the context for an object/event binary. Contextualization here takes place.

As Denny says, "Humans do not change their habits of thought unless there are compelling reasons for doing so" (70). Decontextualized thought comes into ascendancy in societies which become so large that persons can no longer always share the same background information. As persons must frequently interact with strangers who may not be able to supply the correct context for an utterance, more information must be conveyed in what becomes a self-contained message. Here is where Denny sees the original impulse to decontextualized thought. Frequently in Laurence's African fiction, indigenous thought and the actions of characters based on such thinking are to varying extents and levels moving along scales of differentiation and contextualization.

Denny makes the important point that all persons are capable of employing both kinds of thinking, but he says they do so to different extents and in accordance with

various determining social and economic factors. There is clearly no *de facto* Western propensity toward "better" or more logical thought. Many of the British characters in the fiction equate illiteracy with poverty and malnutrition, and literacy with growth of productivity and the advance of civilization. In so doing, they are guilty of a logical fallacy; adverse social conditions in Africa resulted not from an absence of literate thought but from the forced displacement of oral thought. New economic and cultural dictates were foisted upon a population that found the new contexts for behavior cryptic and elusive. In Laurence's African fiction and non-fiction, the "memsahibs" fail to perceive that their actions and those of their government are what make many Africans second-class citizens in their own country. To attribute African difficulties to supposedly innate, "pre-logical," and pre-literate failings proves D. P. Pattanayak's claim that "the power and arrogance of literacy knows no bounds" (90). She goes on to say how imperialist discourses have "not only resulted in oppressive theorizations, but have provided levers to bureaucrats and managers, policymakers and planners, to perpetuate oppression in the name of literacy and modernization." Literacy becomes a strategy for excellence, corporate excellence.

In her essay entitled "The Body's Place: Language, Identity, Consciousness," Ruth El Saffar opens by saying that

> The scientists and philosophers who laid the groundwork for the modern industrial and technological world built their theories and experiments out of a dualistic worldview that came to rely on the eye and the "I" as the basic instruments of observation. (182)

She sees the visual as the major cultural dominant in Western consciousness, a view that had found expression as early as the Romantic period. In his *Biographia Literaria,* Coleridge argues against the "despotism of the eye" before which "we are restless because invisible things are not the objects of vision" (I, 107). David Olson also posits the view that "literacy called into play a highly spatializing sensory modality, the eye, which came to substitute for the ear...[due to] the simple fact that language is written and subject to visual scanning". (254) But he agrees with Deborah Tannen that a more useful way of

distinguishing between mindsets based predominantly on either visual or aural experience is to view things in such dimensions as involvement and information--"speech often, but not always, emphasizing the former, writing the latter." Predominately oral societies rely upon fully contextualized articulations and on the nuanced, postural and gestural interaction between persons during the course of daily life. In highly literate societies, as Olson tells us, "Writing relates individuals and groups in a way quite different from speech." (255). The awareness and interpretation of texts becomes an in-game; oral and literate audiences cannot remain on the same playing field because neither any longer shares the same background information. Interaction between British characters in *This Side Jordan* is marked by the impulse to not say too much aloud--these persons are part of a mass, impersonal audience schooled (literally) in the private consumption of texts, be these business letters, files, memos, essays, policy papers or novels. Johnnie Kestoe must fight against his learned impulses in order to relate orally the personal details of his companions' lives to Cameron Sheppard in order to gain himself a promotion. When he betrays his friends by discussing their personal lives, in an intimate setting with Sheppard,

> It took two hours, and when it was over, Johnnie's shirt was drenched with sweat and his hands were shaking.
> Cameron was looking at him curiously.
> "It wasn't easy to say all that, Johnnie. I know." (173)

Nathaniel's agony comes of the fact that he is neither oral nor literate--he is a confused amalgam of the two. He cannot force himself to return to his native village and try to forget his education, his understanding, albeit a limited one, of literate society. Nor can he rise up in the literate hierarchy, as he has failed his teacher's exam and must remain in a low-level teaching position at an inferior school, firmly entrenched in a society not unlike that of seventeenth-century England where there also was, in Bach's terms, "a hierarchy of illiteracy which faithfully mirrored the hierarchy of status and wealth" (256-57). This twentieth-century, neo-colonial chain of being allows upward mobility only in cases of radically demonstrated potential on the part of Africans. It is extremely difficult for newly literate persons to excel in positions requiring advanced literacy because

> there is a gap between the public literate tradition of the school and the very different and indeed often directly contradictory private oral traditions...[as] the literate mode of communication is such that it does not impose itself as forcefully or as uniformly as is the case with the oral transmission of the cultural tradition. In non-literate society every social situation cannot but bring the individual into contact with the group's patterns of thought, feeling and action: the choice is between the cultural tradition--or solitude. (*OL* 59)

The demands of his traditional family members prevent Nathaniel from becoming further indoctrinated into literate society, and his compromised standing keeps him from being able to ensure that his students have a chance to do better. At the close of the novel, despite his chance to continue teaching, he looks to his son to enter wholly into the Western, literate world: "Cross Jordan, Joshua."

The final theoretical viewpoint I wish to raise in this chapter belongs to Neil Postman and is articulated in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (I should here mention that Postman acknowledges the strong influence of Marshall McLuhan on his work). The author is intrigued by a passage in the Bible, the Second Commandment of the Decalogue, which prohibits the Israelites from making concrete images of anything: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water beneath the earth." Postman finds it odd that this edict is essentially a prohibition against certain ways of symbolizing experience, and wonders if

> *its author assumed a connection between forms of human communication and the quality of a culture....*The God of the Jews was to exist in the Word, and through the Word, an unprecedented conception requiring the highest order of abstract thinking. Iconography thus became blasphemy so that a new kind of God could enter a culture. (9)

Goody reminds us of Plato's wariness of writing, his conviction that oral transmission is the superior means by which to communicate values. Goody sees the philosopher's position as "an indication of his prescient awareness of the danger of using abstract words about whose referents no common agreement or identity of understanding has been established" (51). (Ironically, Plato voiced a concern over literacy that many critics today

voice over what they perceive as the indeterminate nature of oral history.) It becomes clear in Laurence's African fiction that to shift theological referents away from idols and socially, orally transmitted lore and toward a religion based on literacy--on the word--is to give the interloping missionaries the superior position from which to dispel theoretical argument: they would control interpretation. The idea that "the media of communication available to a culture are a dominant influence on the formation of the culture's intellectual and social preoccupations" (9) would not likely occur to the likes of Brother Lemon and Matthew's missionary father. Their constant desire to banish idolatrous images is in accordance with standard, Christian theological dictates originally set forth long ago by persons who did understand that the medium is the message. Because of this insight, those missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who were set on converting Africans and on spreading the cause of literacy accomplished a transfiguration of African culture that they did not understand. Laurence's depictions of their efforts illuminate the complexities involved.

In the novel and the short stories, Africans suffer tremendously as they try to adapt to the demands of an incomprehensibly alien method of communication, one that promises a prosperity but only grants it on specific terms. The struggle involved is perhaps most poignantly depicted in "The Tomorrow-Tamer," where Kofi courageously attempts to conjoin and reconcile the old, oral world with the new literate one. His death is not without meaning, as he does manage, in the minds of his people, to appease the spirit of the bridge, thereby bringing them strength and peace of mind with which to face their future trials. There is a high level of correlation between how oral cultures are depicted in Laurence and in the analyses by theorists of orality and literacy; it is almost as if this passage from Ong provided the basis for Kofi's story:

> There is hardly an oral culture or a predominantly oral culture left in the world today that is not somehow aware of the vast complex of powers forever inaccessible without literacy. This awareness is agony for persons rooted in primary orality, who want literacy passionately but who also know very well that moving into the exciting world of literacy means

leaving behind much that is exciting and deeply loved in the earlier oral world. We have to die to continue living. (15)

Chapter Two

Taming Tomorrow When It Comes: Cultural Adaptation in the Short Stories

> I'm sure one of the main themes in all my writing is this sense of man's isolation from his fellows and how almost unbearably tragic this is.
>
> --Margaret Laurence

In his 1963 work *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story*, Frank O' Connor discusses the Russian writer Gogol, and states at one point that the short story form flourishes in moments of social upheaval and is best suited to expressing the lonely voice of submerged populations during times of oppression. Laurence's experimentation with the short story form during attempts to articulate the pains suffered by Ghanaians during the pre-independence years seems appropriate. It is true that Laurence herself was not living in Africa at the time the *Tomorrow-Tamer* stories were published, was not herself a member of a submerged population except in so far as she viewed Canadian writers as being engaged in battle with dominant forms of a Commonwealth discourse, writers who were increasingly creating "out of their own people and their own culture, the sight of their own eyes, not taking as their models British or American writers, but developing the consciousness of their own people and culture" (Laurence in Sullivan 79). But, as I have argued, Laurence is, in her fiction, attempting to reach out beyond her own culture's concerns in order to express the difficulties of a culture in transition--possibly, she is responding to the Akan proverb that reads, "Man is not a palm-nut that he should be self-centered". Laurence's life-long interest in aural/oral experience is first manifest in her early writing and is still evident in her final work:

> A middle-aged man came in with a short manuscript and announced, "I want you to tell me how to write." I told him, "I can't really do that." He asked, "What *should* I do?" I said, "Listen to how people talk, if you're going to write fiction." He paused, then he said, "I don't often hear people talking." That sentence, and what it implied, chilled me. (*Dance On The Earth* 194)

Laurence here acknowledges an important causal link: oral experience that is intricately bound up in the immediate world of human interaction is a necessary precursor to meaningful literate expression. Human beings have ever been creatures of orality, learning to write only very recently in our history. To a great extent, our individual lives mirror this evolution as we learn to speak long before we learn to write. Laurence is "chilled" that the man who asks her advice is treating his reading as a primary field of experience from which his own impressions of life then flow. In his case, literate voice has supplanted oral/aural experience. Within the ten stories that make up the collection, different modes of communication based on orality and literacy respectively rarely interact in an effective and meaningful manner. People do not hear one another. From this critical lack of connection may be seen to come many of the assumptions, biases, and pieces of misinformation that perpetuate tensions between the colonial forces and the indigenous population.

In this chapter I shall discuss six of the ten stories in detail: "The Drummer of All The World," "The Perfume Sea," and "The Merchant of Heaven," each of which convincingly portray the colonial mentality, and "The Tomorrow-Tamer," "The Pure Diamond Man," and "The Voices of Adamo," three stories which together offer a tripartite depiction of Africans' attempt to adapt to a literate world. I shall refer incidentally to "Godman's Master" and "A Gourdful of Glory," and as concerns "The Rain Child" and "A Fetish for Love," I will refer readers to the 1983 essay by W. H. New which I discussed in my introduction. In that work, New offers a good discussion of literacy and orality and shows how each may apply to the two stories. I do not wish to echo or duplicate his analysis. However, I would refer the reader of this thesis to my first chapter and biblography, both of which show the sources of the majority of New's remarks on the subject, sources which he does not cite nor apply to stories far more open to this type of approach.

Rosemary Sullivan has said to Laurence that she always felt the African fiction worked "in patterns, not superimposed symbols; characters are often able to liberate themselves from the deadlocks in which they get trapped, by acting out rituals" (66). As I shall discuss later, the attempt by characters to enact a ritual in order to improve their lot takes place most often in the stories of Tetteh, Kofi and Adamo. Sullivan's point about the presence of patterns in the works, organic delineations that appear in place of imposed symbols, speaks to the point I raised earlier about Laurence's basic material for her stories arising up out of the will to cross-cultural experience and careful, anthropological observation and research. From careful presentation of observable social phenomena comes the ebb and flow of well-wrought fiction. It is out of such efforts that Laurence patterns the conceptual differences between British and African oral and literate thought. Her research approach, her will to field work that is moderated by an ethical concern for appropriation of voice and imperialistic construction of African society in writing is clearly evident in her responses to Sullivan:

> Well I think that certainly Somaliland was where I began to learn about a small / liberal such as myself....I never spoke an African language. People that I knew there of course spoke English. But even if you're speaking the same language, you're speaking out of a different conceptual background. It takes you a while to understand that when you make a statement and a Somali replies, he isn't necessarily saying what you think he's saying. It's very hard to understand people of another culture; of *course* it is possible. (63-4)

Later in the same interview, Laurence states that after she read Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban: the Psychology of Colonialism,* the work

> struck me with the force of realization, because a lot of the conclusions that he had come to, as a psychologist, with a great deal better, in a sense, equipment, I had in my own way come to similar conclusions. (67)

The field work of Mannoni confirmed Laurence's own observations, just as theories of orality and literacy can give credence to aspects of her artistic productions.

Fiona Sparrow asserts that "It was not always with happy results that Laurence allowed Mannoni's work to influence her thinking," and she says so because of the highly

provisional and cautious manner in which Mannoni humbly set forth his opinions (he was presumably aware of their weaknesses), and because she believes that, "striking though the metaphor from *The Tempest* may be, it cannot be used with such ease to explain the causes and results of colonialism" (151). She claims that "Adamo's story seems contrived, its tragic ending unconvincing." Sparrow fails to take into account that Laurence, too, offered with great humility her African fiction and non-fiction in the face of the colonial problem--Laurence was entirely aware of the tentative and provisional nature of attempts to cross cultural boundaries. Also, Sparrow does not consider what else Laurence may have added to her personal understanding in addition to Mannoni before weaving her African fictions; there is not a one-on-one correlation between the fiction and this one source. The story in question overflows with fictionally incorporated, raw social data that point a reader toward the complexities involved in the clash of literate and oral consciousness, an interface given full treatment in the stories, yet not mentioned anywhere in Sparrow's otherwise excellent book.

In "The Drummer of All the World," literacy thematically proclaims itself at the outset. The story is narrated by Matthew, the son of a British missionary to Africa. He begins by saying how his childhood was characterized by a belief in "Salvation," while later in life "salvation" became a more nebulous and untenable concept--the use of upper and lower-case letters draws our attention to the diminished importance attributed to the concept. The climate of the west coast of Africa appears symbolically resistant to literacy as, "A green fur of mold grew over everything, especially over my father's precious books, irritating him to the point of desperation" (1). Matthew's mother loathes Africans and their country, yet she will not admit this and spends her days in the little church, "chalking up the week's attendance," seeking to assimilate the names of Africans into her written letters as her missionary husband would subsume their souls into the words of divine scripture. Matthew says of Kwabena's mother Yaa that "she was more mother to me than my own mother" (16). But despite his being taught Akan custom by this

surrogate parent, told the stories and proverbs of her people, and even learning Twi "better than English" (2), he cannot dispense with his Western perspective that would see such "noble savages" frozen in an idyllic past. By the close of the story he is unable to reevaluate his assumptions in order to draw nearer the values and attitudes of the land he purports to love.

He quite remains his father's son, ultimately aligning himself with the root cause of colonial oppression: the belief that the Africans are pre-logical, primitive, closer to the earth and to an Edenic innocence--decidedly unable to take on Western systems of thought and expression such as literacy. His father is a *fidei defensor,* one of the more zealous missionaries residing in the fiction:

> My father was an idol breaker of the old school. He hated only one thing more than the heathen gods and that was the Roman Catholic Church.
>
> "Formalism, Latin--all learned by rote," he would say. "They have no spontaneity. None at all."
>
> Spontaneity to my father meant drilling the Mission Boys' Fife and Drum Band to play "Nearer My God to Thee" until their mouths were sore and puckered and their head spinning with the uncomprehended tune....My father taught the boys to read and write; and who knows, in the eternal scheme of things perhaps that is all he was meant to do....For twenty years he tried to frighten and cajole his flock away from drumming and dancing, the accompaniments of the old religion. He forbade the making of wood figures....He broke idols literally as well as symbolically. (4)

The passage quoted above recalls Postman' s observation that the declaring of iconography as a blasphemy allowed a new god that existed primarily in words to come into being. Pertinent as well is Plato's concern over the proliferation of abstract referents--written words--with no commonly agreed upon meaning. Matthew's father has an antipathy toward not only the wooden carvings and fetishes (tangible but entirely non-lexical symbols of religious and spiritual significance), but to the Catholic church as well. Whereas with Africans he denies the means of expression by which certain religious sects represent meaning (and in so doing, emulating Moses--Matthew notes that "Moses broke the idols of his own people" [5]), with fellow Christians he will argue scriptural interpretation and proper religious practice. As he charges, the Catholics teach Formalism

and Latin by rote, but he will teach hymns, reading, and writing as readily by rote. He displays the urge to inundate other cultures with the edicts and trappings of his belief system. He sees no wrong in doing so and does not even even concede that others should be allowed to act as he does. The issue is one of control, control of religious practices and of biblical interpretation. The Africans, unfamiliar with written expression of any kind, will be particularly malleable to Protestant interpretation of scripture and church doctrine, unversed as they are in Western forms of logical argument, history, and hermeneutic practices. Religious leaders in all early societies were the first to discover writing and use it to their own ends, creating the hierarchies of illiteracy that were perpetuated into the later part of the twentieth-century.

The missionaries met with tremendous resistance in the matter of religious conversion, since the Africans already had firmly entrenched methods of communication which were intricately bound up in belief and spiritual expression: "However powerfully my father preached, he could not stop the drums playing in the evenings" (7). Here, as in "The Merchant of Heaven," the missionaries meet with success only when Africans, desperate for respite from the pains of their poverty, turn to a religion which accompanies the technologies that allow Westerners to prosper at home and in Africa. The Africans hope more for earthly rewards than for transmundane salvation.

Laurence, ever interested in the processes of memory, depicts Matthew's selective amnesia in order to show his unwillingness to accept Africa's transformation from what he perceived as an Edenic past to a society much more closely aligned with the Western world: "How can I describe Kwabena, who was my first and for many years my only friend? I cannot think of him as he is now. The reality of him is the little boy I remember" (7). Matthew's taking of the girl Afua near a sacred grove outside Takoradi is a metaphoric reaffirmation of his immutable will to remain in control of a growing and changing continent, a sex act after which he feels he "possessed all earth" (12). When he first espies Afua dancing "in the sudden knowledge of her womanhood," he leads

Kwabena "back the other way, so he should not see her" (9-10). He would deny his African friend knowledge of the processes, in any form, of change and maturation.

Matthew maintains this attitude throughout his adult life and is castigated for it harshly by Kwabena when they meet again as adults. When Matthew returns to Africa he finds the many changes that have taken place distasteful. He sees a "mushroom sprouting of a dozen hand-set newspapers...slogans painted on mammy-lories...names of highlife bands...advertisements in newspapers...(one of which reads) 'I am engaged to a girl whose illiteracy is causing me great embarrassment--can you advise?'" (13). The proliferation of printing presses in Africa historically echoed the collapse of the royal press in England in 1641. In each case, literacy increased, but the "hierarchy of illiteracy" to which I referred in my first chapter was established. This social structure reflected the existing class structure and all its inequities (and to a large extent, as I shall argue in my third chapter, this structure still exists). Although Ghana gains increased levels of literacy, Kwabena cannot rise above the station of medical orderly unless he receives a scholarship to attend a school in England. The former colony is now caught up in a global hierarchy of various levels of attained literacy in which the citizens of nations must seek to obtain education abroad. This is a situation that clearly favours the long-literate British. After a strained exchange, Matthew reveals his prejudice to Kwabena by proclaiming bitterly that he does not "see anything very clever in all this cheap copying of western ways," and in so doing, he reveals to Kwabena that he has done his missionary father one better--Kwabena says of Matthew's father that "Nearly everything he did was wrong. But at least he did not want us to stand still" (17).

In "The Merchant of Heaven," Laurence presents us with another missionary, Brother Lemon, who has arrived from the Angel of Philadelphia church overseas. From the outset, Will Kettridge, an architect who will design Brother Lemon's new church and who acts as unofficial guide for the American, sees that the priest expects "the Africa of Livingstone or Burton" (52), and that his view of Africa is formed at once by nineteenth-

century British exploration narratives and the Protestant interpretation of scripture. Brother Lemon is a comic figure, powerless and ineffectual despite a rigid and often cruel zealousness. Will Kettridge and Danso (the African artist who was educated and learned painting in England) provide equally interesting and thematically important characterizations.

The three men represent different points along an imperialist line. Brother Lemon represents an absurd extreme. His approach to proselytizing (his stated aim is to spread the word of "the Revelation of St. John" and to "have a thousand souls within six months" [52]) is predicated on an outdated notion of Africa. The continent is in transition, is becoming literate and contemporary, transforming culturally under the influence of British economic power and a myriad of religious influences, both Western and Eastern in origin. Brother Lemon does not perceive the complexities of the cultural forces at work and instead exhibits a slavish adherence to the dictates of the religious texts that guide his actions, his interpretations of which remain literal, static and fundamentalist. Like Matthew's father, he seeks to bring about a world that is not at variance with his literate vision. Although Will Kettridge is friend to Danso and understands many of the ways in which Africa has changed, he, too, envisions a future for Ghana that is predicated entirely on advanced literacy and Western conceptions of an imposed and linear African history:

> A hundred years from now, when the markets and shanties have been supplanted by hygienic skyscrapers, when the gutters no longer reek, when Pidgin English has grown from a patois into a sedate language boasting grammar texts and patriotic poems, then Africans will look nostalgically at Danso's pictures of the old teeming days, and will probably pay fabulous prices. (61)

To recall Pattanayak, Kettridge echoes the sentiment of "Western scholars [that] have persisted in their assertion that literacy played a decisive role in the development of what we may call modernity" (105). Illiteracy is, once more, equated with poverty, while literacy denotes the advance of civilization. In fact, there are economic reasons that are primarily responsible for poverty in the countries of West Africa . For instance, the

British wanted to teach the Nigerians how to read and write because other countries needed Nigeria to increase its exports (see my third chapter discussion of this enterprise). *This Side Jordan* dynamically portrays the Western drive toward universal literacy as being motivated by a will to corporate excellence and capitalist expansion. UNESCO literacy pamphlets even contain the ominous promise that efforts are underway to instill various "socioethical principles" amongst newly literate groups. Such "principles" are not explicitly defined; they likely echo the sentiment, to use the vernacular of commerce, that increased literacy equals increased competitiveness, a phrase that today ironically takes on the quality of a proverb. Postman very much understates the case when he suggests that "We know enough about language to understand that variations in the structures of languages [i. e. oral or literate language] will result in what may be called 'world view'" (3). The political orientations of both Brother Lemon and Will Kettridge are the product of their education and of the modes of that learning.

When Kettridge and Danso attend Brother Lemon's mass and observe the poverty-stricken congregation, Danso perceives the converts' misinterpretation of the words of the sermon, and he remarks on how Christian theology, in an African context, serves to distract people from the social problems perpetuated by British foreign policy:

> "My people," Danso remarked, "drink dreams like palm wine."
> "What is the harm in that?"
> "Oh, nothing. But if you dream too long, nothing else matters. Listen--he is telling them that life on earth doesn't matter. So the guinea worm stays in the flesh. The children still fall into the latrine pits and die with excrement in their mouths. And women sit for all eternity, breaking building stones with hammers for two shillings a day." (67)

Danso's own mother attends the service. She has a malignant growth, but will not see a British doctor. She turns, as so many Africans in the fiction do, to a sect of the Christian religion out of a practical, earthly need, not a purely spiritual one as Brother Lemon hopes. This will to exploring other religious experiences is linked to the advent of literacy in oral cultures. In his discussion of early, restricted literacy in Northern Ghana,

Jack Goody notes the pragmatic reasons for the eventual African acceptance (I would say interpolation) of foreign modes of communication and religious practice. Africans were understandably unwilling to reject traditional beliefs outright, a fact evident in that both Matthew's father and Brother Lemon are tormented by the continual return to pagan practices of those they believe converted. But the illiterate members of oral cultures see in the

> capacity to write a more effective means of supernatural communication as well as of human intercourse: the very fact that writing enables men to communicate over space and time makes it more effective as a way of getting in touch with distant deities. (201)

Writing had long since taken on a magico-religious property in African societies:

> For non-literate cultures, in Northern Ghana as throughout the world, the magic of the written word derived from its pragmatic value as a means of communication, from its association with a priesthood, and from its high prestige and technical achievements of the cultures of which it formed a part....Yet institutional systems of belief, since they depend so directly upon linguistic intercourse, are very open to changes in the network of communication which in turn is influenced by changes in the media themselves. (206, 215)

Religious belief, the means of human communication, and matters of economic exigency are not separate conceptual realms in the minds of the illiterate characters as they are in the mind of Brother Lemon.

Arguably, this is one of the key elements of African society that Laurence wishes to convey. That is why she is at great pains to depict the missionary's negative response to pagan religions and to the employment of traditional drumming and oral speech as means of expression. To this end, she depicts Brother Lemon's attempts to attract converts through the dispensation of church money. Though he does not seem cognizant of his actions, he is aware of the practical appeal of Western faith to Africans. He justifies his handouts to parishioners by saying, "Lots of churches advertise nowadays" (59). When he can no longer afford to give extravagantly, he continues to offer free orange squash and *kenkey* at his services. It is his inability to understand the totalizing impulse of African consciousness that leads to his final disillusionment once his fledgling

congregation moves on to other churches in the continual effort to improve their lot and mitigate their pain. Brother Lemon has no idea of the complex stream of cultural evolution and dynamic transformation of thought and modes of communication that he enters into. As Kettridge observes:

> This city had assimilated many gods. A priest of whatever faith would not have had to stay here very long in order to realize that the competition was stiff. I heard indirectly that Brother Lemon's conversions, after the initial success of novelty, were tailing off. The Homowo festival was absorbing the energies of the Ga people as they paid homage to the ancient gods of the coast. A touring faith-healer from Rhodesia was drawing large crowds. The Baptists staged a parade. The Roman Catholic's celebrated a saint's day, and the Methodists parried with a picnic. A new god arrived from the northern deserts....The oratory of a visiting *imam* from Nigeria was boosting the local strength of Islam....[Brother Lemon] was really having to scrabble for them now. (70)

The missionary is utterly incapable of promoting a belief system that in itself need not be static and unadaptable, but the expression of which, by his choice, is.

His inability to control interpretation of his religious text is perfectly exemplified in the scene where an angry throng of old blind men, beggars, come to him demanding that he keep his promise made to them in church. They expect that

> the evangelist intended to throw a feast for them, at which, in the traditional African manner, a sheep would be throat-slit and sacrificed, then roasted and eaten (and where) Palm wine would flow freely. Brother Lemon, furthermore, would restore the use of their eyes. (72)

His interpreter's knowledge of English vocabulary and fundamentalist doctrine, and the context for each, is limited; "He had only translated them in his own way, and the listening beggars had completed *the transformation of the text* by hearing what they wanted to *hear* " (72, my emphasis). Laurence here, symbolically and through dramatic action, depicts the indigenous will to the oral, to manipulating knowledge and expression in close relation to the human lifeworld and away from abstractions:

> The text that caused the confusion was from chapter seven of Revelation. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them into living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." (73)

A finely sharpened irony comes in the fact that, although Brother Lemon is incredulous at their confused and literal interpretation of divine scripture, he himself interprets the Book of Revelations as a literal account of what is to come: "Brother Lemon did not regard the Apocalypse as poetry...[but as] positive proof" (60).

In her essay entitled "Beyond Orality: Canada and Australia," Katryna Olijnyk states that Indians, Inuit and Australian aboriginals are in a complex political relationship with a dominant culture and its discourses. These indigenous persons, she claims, are attempting to write themselves into the processes that wrote them out. This is precisely the case with Danso, the British educated and highly acerbic African nationalist, who dances precariously between the economic opportunities the British in Africa offer and the representational ways he finds of expressing his disdain for imperialism. Danso exists at the opposite end of the imperialist line from Brother Lemon (Kettridge occupies the middle ground). Danso's art exists between the various historical interpretations of belief that he has encountered by studying different cultures. When he first discusses with Kettridge the possibility that Brother Lemon will commission him to paint pictures for the new church, he reveals his mental ability to see beyond his own cultural orientation. He states that the missionary would appreciate Rousseau-style work, "very stiff, very stylized" (54), a picture, he declares, of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. But, upon giving voice to his speculation, Danso immediately begins to adapt it to an African context. Sardonically, he states that the saint might be pictured on the banks of the Congo or Niger rivers with hippos in the water singing "Hallelujah." In his art, he would gladly (and finally does) make explicit reference to the introduction of foreign beliefs into an African perspective. He does so by interpreting the written word differently than Brother Lemon in order to make a point. Danso begins "leafing through the Bible that was Brother Lemon's invariable companion," and Kettridge sees that the apocalyptic vision "had caught his imagination" (63). Soon after Brother Lemon dismisses him as a pagan, Danso presents to the priest a painting of a black Jesus. The missionary's

> tall frame sagged as though he had been struck and--yes--hurt. The old gods he could fight. He could grapple with and overcome every obstacle, even his own pity. But this was a threat he had never anticipated. He spoke in a low voice.
>
> "Do many--do all of you--see Him like that?" (76)

After this, his final failure to control interpretation, he leaves Africa. Laurence is shrewdly demonstrating in story how emerging African artists can and did appropriate ideas and formulations of belief and history to suit their own ends. By doing so, she shows how advocates of undiluted and unwelcome foreign ideas may be effectively resisted (Brother Lemon is symbolically banished, sent back to his own country after an African claiming of Christian legend). Olijnyk asks a key question: "how can the black subject posit a full and sufficient self in a language in which blackness is a sign of absence?" (31). In her fiction, Laurence answers this query by demonstrating in story Olijnyk's claim that it is only by re-writing, re-expressing, in conjunction with indigenous belief and culture, that new histories can gain the power to deflate imperialist ones. To the extent that the establishment depends on the inarticulacy of the governed, good writing or socially aware art of any kind is inherently subversive.

In "The Perfume Sea," two expatriates of unknown origin, Mr. Archipelago and Doree, earn their living as hair stylists. They cater exclusively to the wives of British men employed by an import-export company that, it is found out, may be leaving after Ghanaian independence is declared. Dramatic action once more takes place along the fault line between British, literate economics and attitudes and the indigenous and oral traditions. Throughout the stories there reappears an almost Hegelian construction wherein the thesis is the old Africa, the antithesis the interloping British culture, and the synthesis a partially literate Ghana wherein all characters seek to identify their roles in the new order, either perishing or re-inventing themselves in the process.

Also reappearing is the proclamation by Laurence at the outset of the story of the central role played by literacy. The narrative opens with Archipelago, Doree, and Mrs. Webley-Price arguing the precise semantic meaning of the words "flotsam" and "jetsam."

Reference is made to "the Concise Oxford," and it is immediately apparent that all three are educated and literate minded, though to varying extents. Doree remarks on Archipelago:

> "Can you beat it?" she said. "He looks up words all the time, and laughs like the dickens. I used to read the telephone book sometimes, in the nights, and wonder about those names and if they all belonged to real people, living somewhere. But I never laughed." (22)

Doree expresses some wonder and anxiety over the connection of words with the world outside the salon, and, by extension, over the connection between sign and signifier. Ong makes the point that our literate culture, with its newspapers, libraries, and computers, can rest on the notion that our thoughts are somehow "out there" in the real world. Literate persons are always intrigued and baffled by the ethereality of oral cultures, wherein law, norms of behavior, and artistic expression only exist within the evanescent realm of sound, in the fleeting instant of a spoken phrase. Archipelago enjoys finding symbolic echoes of his personal situation within the definitions of words he chooses to look up. We are here reminded of the fact that, while oral cultures must rely on high degrees of social interaction and communication to experience what is, by comparison with literate cultures, a very direct level of semantic ratification, literate cultures may turn to solitary consultation of written documents. But in the latter system, the act is (in the African context) anti-social, the oral culture's approach being much more intimate and involved with human communities. Laurence realizes this and symbolizes the often fragmented social world of literate culture by depicting Archipelago and Doree as isolated:

> The evenings were spent quietly. They did not go out anywhere, nor did they entertain. They had always been considered socjally non-existent by the European community, while in the Africans' view they were standard Europeans and therefore apart. (33)

The action of the story almost entirely takes place within the hair salon and the adjacent apartments, the premises becoming a symbolic refuge for the literate British abroad. The pair run a business that can only survive at the close of the story by appealing to the

newly literate Africans with a new commercial sign. Archipelago and Doree survive by appealing to the emerging consciousness forged and propagated by the presence of foreigners such as themselves.

Introduced in this story is the key motif of commercial signage, the most obvious and spatially located manifestation of economic-based literacy. The appearance of these signs throughout the works involves a three-tiered model of symbolic representation. First, when literacy is introduced, written linguistic constructs come to symbolize referents external to the text--writing itself is essentially symbolic. Second, commercial signage symbolizes not only the presence of a particular business enterprise, but the manifestation in a particular place and time of attendant though non-explicit political assumptions. The sign declaring the presence of "Bridgeford & Knight, Exporters-Importers" in an African context declares the lingering British, colonial and mercantile presence. Such signs implicitly declare regal and noble empire-building or an invasive, imperialist entity--persons interpret these attendant symbolic significances depending on their political allegiances. (A more contemporary, and in the context of this discussion, highly ironic example of corporate signage being employed with both social and commercial intent, involves the logos of both Coke and MacDonald's--each is repeatedly presented in multi-million dollar television advertising campaigns as trans-national and multicultural. Quite frequently, Africans are depicted enjoying either Coke or Big Macs in, of all places, ancient tribal settings.) Thirdly, Laurence draws attention to commercial signage in her fiction as a means of conveying a private symbolism. Signs throughout the works remind readers that means of expression and communication are what best reflect inner, conceptual workings of the mind. How these signs operate at a social level, and how characters react around them and toward them, best illuminates the clash of cultures.

Archipelago and Doree piece together the few elements of their understanding of the outside world as they piece together the letters which create the signs that so affect their lives (later, Doree says she once "really went for that ouija-board stuff" [39]--this

remark provides an earlier instance of the woman scanning for signs, for insight, and finding these in the arrangement of letters, in literacy). In the salon, she explains to the European customer that,

> "I had my own shop once," she said in her gentle rasping voice. "It had a sign up--DOREEN/BEAUTY INCORPORATED. Classy. Done in those gilt letters. You buy them separately and stick them up. The state of my dough wasn't so classy, though. So when the goddam 'N' fell off, I figured it was cheaper to change my name to fit the sign." (28)

For Doree, the sign and its lettering represents "Classy," the upper-class standing of those who are publicly represented by literacy. As the letter "N" falls away, Doree's financial situation is symbolically affected adversely, and she finds it easier to adapt to her new name as it is laid out for her in print.

Her situation is markedly similar to that of the indigenous Ghanaians, who found it necessary to adapt to a literacy so linked to financial prosperity. Doree has ended up working for Archipelago, whose sign reads:

ARCHIPELAGO
English-Style Barber
European Ladies' Hairdresser (30)

This sign defines the means by which they survive--their clients are European. But their business is threatened by a society that itself changes the emblematic representation of how it is defined; when independence is gained, "Flags changed" and "newspaper men typed furiously to meet a deadline" (35). The pair's business caters exclusively to British customers who are now leaving the country in droves. Tachie, the African landlord who stops by to collect unpaid rent on the shop, represents the intrusion into the salon space (a spot frozen in a past moment with its wave-machine and hair dryer referred to twice as museum pieces) of the new Africa that is in turn represented by the first appearance in the story of Pidgin English, the hybrid form of expression that is English modified by African ears and tongues: "Mistah Arch'pelago, why you humbug me? Two month, and nevah one penny I getting. You t'ink I rich too much? You t'ink I no need for dis money?" (40). When Tachie mentions in passing that his daughter is presently enamored of Western

fashions of dress, it dawns on Archipelago and Doree that they can cater to this impulse, simply re-adjust their position in a society still highly influenced by Western forays into their economy and culture. They need not fundamentally adjust their attitudes or approach to business at all, but cater now to African womens' desire to have their skin lightened with make-up and their hair straightened. A new sign is made up:

ARCHIPELAGO AND DOREE
Barbershop
All-Beauty Salon
African Ladies a Specialty

Their business survives, and symbolically, a certain type of European commercial interest finds a foothold in the new Africa--the kind that can benefit from Western influences on African culture. Although the pair are likable characters and certainly pitiable, Laurence ultimately depicts them as parasitic, only able to survive by adapting to a society that had little choice but to become literate.

Nowhere in Laurence's African fiction may theories of literacy and orality be more fruitfully applied than in "The Tomorrow-Tamer," "The Voices of Adamo," and "The Pure Diamond Man." The oral "Everyman" that I have said Ong develops in the course of his discussions may be said to take shape in these stories. Laurence manages to portray the link between varying types of conceptual and perceptual thought and their link to social behaviors and organization in a myriad of ways that connect intricately and discursively with one another. Everywhere in evidence are the assumptions held by British characters that the will to literacy and logic is innate or natural, and that the "primitive," "pre-logical" or pre-literate status of the Africans is due to an inherent flaw in their intellectual make-up. All of Ong's nine distinctions between oral and literate thought may be applied, shedding new light on the characters' motivations and actions, as may Denny's delineation between differentiating and contextualizing forms of thought. The distinction between the sensory modalities of the eye and the ear that El Saffar and others discuss is also useful. Tetteh is one of the few characters in the fiction who successfully transverses the gap between the new literate and the old oral worlds that

simultaneously influence Ghanaian society. Adamo utterly fails in this regard, is entirely uncognizant of the traditional and colonial powers that affect his life and shape his destiny, so it is not surprising that he does not survive. Kofi, too, meets his end in trying to pilot himself through such straits. Although his story involves what Craig Tapping calls "a narrative of heroic resistance to inevitable tragic loss" ("Voices" 80), his attempts to derive meaning out of his circumstances, in tandem with his unfortunate fall, result in his people being able to come to terms with the enormous and frightening bridge, the building of which threatens to rend the fabric of life in the village.

Kofi's and Adamo's villages are the only two settings in Laurence's African fiction depicting primary oral cultures. The inclusion of two such settings in the collection of stories means that readers may observe literacy and its effects operating on African society at different stages, from the early British presence in a primary oral culture to the shrewd efforts of Victor Edusei in *This Side Jordan* to counter the manipulation of literacy by neo-imperialist forces. The novel and the other stories in the collection deal with African societies that, to varying extents, have already been changed by the presence of literacy. In "The Tomorrow-Tamer," Kofi's village, Owurasu, is beside a river in which it is believed that Owura, the god of the river resides. Near the shore is the deity's sacred grove, where Nana Ayensu ritually communes with the spirit. The people of the village fish and grow crops of yam and cassava. The only western influence present at the outset of the story is the "*Hail Mary Chop-Bar & General Merchants*" store run by the literate Danquah, a character whom Laurence portrays for several pages before introducing Kofi, the story's protagonist. She presents Danquah first in order to set up the oral/literate binary opposition, as represented by the two characters. Readers then have the desired context for the action immediately at hand. When the British workmen create havoc in the village, their actions are not bizarre and threatening to the literate Danquah, who, significantly, is without family:

> Danquah had gone to a mission school once, long ago. He was not really of the village...the villagers regarded Danquah as a harmless madman.

> The storekeeper had no kin here, and if he had relatives elsewhere, he never mentioned them. (79, 81)

He represents the detached and newly literate African, divorced at once from both a British, literate society and an oral, African one. The British presence, however, brings on for Kofi, the illiterate adolescent who is surrounded by family and is highly integrated into the community, both anxiety and the need to re-invent himself.

The "painted sign" of the store ("Only Danquah could read it") represents a peripheral part of a village where, despite Danquah's presence, "the wind was the thin whisper-speech of ancestral spirits" (78); literacy has not yet made extensive inroads into village life. Neither he nor literacy occupies any position of importance within the community. Readers first encounter Danquah sitting alone admiring the writing on the labels of beer bottles which he proudly displays in his shop, and find that he is irritated over not having with him "the old newspaper which he habitually carried, " an emblem of his literacy which he wishes he held for solace during the moments when the children laugh at his "scarred and aging body" (79). Many children enter his shop and excitedly tell him about the bridge that is to be built, and Danquah thinks to himself that the sound of their voices seems as "fragments cast here and there, a froth of confusion" (79). The children received the news along an oral line of transmission that, while originating from the mouth of a literate, government clerk, is relayed by the illiterate ferryman. The news arrives in the village and is makes its rounds within the oral community. The children are engaged in interactive discussion while Danquah's mind summons up words connected to business he has done with the British in the past, words that surface in his mind "like weed shreds in the sluggish river....Highland Queen whisky. De Reszke cigarettes. Chivers marmalade" (80). Distracted by the remembrances these words bring back, he forgets the social context that he is in and asks the boy,

> "...Do you think its true, this news?"
> The boy grinned and shrugged. Danquah felt irritated at himself, that he had asked. An elder would not have asked a boy's opinion. (80)

When the reader is finally introduced to Kofi, the contrast between him and Danquah, as the two exist along the oral/literate interface, is sharply apparent. Danquah is a literate voice alone in what he perceives as a wilderness:

> He drank the costly beer and held aloft his ragged newspaper, bellowing the printed words to the toads that slept always in the clusters in the corners, or crying sadly and drunkenly, while the village boys peered and tittered without pity. (81)

In a sudden shift, the unintruding narrator switches subjects, and the nature of the cultural characteristics featured until that point shift also: Danquah's printed words become the markings Kofi's feet make in the sand, as "The young man walked home, his bare feet making light crescent prints in the dust" (81).

One of Kofi's sisters communicates to him that Akua, a village girl, wants to know if Kofi "is a boy or a man," and he, happy at the news, sings a song to himself:

> *Do you ask a question*
> *Akua, Akua?*
> *In a grove dwells an oracle,*
> *Oh Akua--*
> *Come to the grove when the village sleeps.* (82)

He then sits on the ground and drums on the earth with outspread hands. At the sacred grove, not only do Okomfo Ofori and the village elders gather to commune with the river god, to ask of Owura what is to be done about the British arrival, but young persons visit it as a site for clandestine, romantic meetings. The grove is the physical manifestation of the center of the village's collective and very public consciousness.

When Kofi arrives home to his hut to speak with his father about the news, the speech acts that take place, performed by his grandmother and father respectively, are revealing:

> Kofi dutifully went to greet his grandmother. She was brittle and small and fleshless as the empty shell of a tortoise. She rarely spoke, and then only to recite her genealogy, or to complain of chill. Being blind, she liked to run her fingers over the faces of her grandchildren. Kofi smiled so that she could touch his smile. She murmured to him, but it was the name of one of his dead brothers.
>
> "And when I think of the distance we walked," Kofi's father was saying, "to clear the new patch for the cocoyam, and now it turns out to be no good, and the yams are half the size they should be, and I ask myself why I

> should be afflicted in this way, because I have no enemies, unless you want to count Donkor, and he went away ten years ago, so it couldn't be him, and if it is a question of libation, who has been more generous than I, always making sure the gods drank before the planting--"
>
> He went on in this way for some time, and Kofi waited. (83)

The first two of Ong's distinctions between oral and literate thought are in evidence in the words of Kofi's father. Compared with the short, sharp subordinative quality of Danquah's words to the children in his store, the father's speech is highly additive. In the above quote, "and" appears six times, and his speech seems run-on unless it is understood by readers that Laurence is seeking to represent oral speech accurately. The conventions of literate fiction must here be strained in order to accompany a representation of the oral. Second, the father's words and meanings are aggregative rather than analytic. The sense of what he is saying emerges out of context, out of a slow, circling round-up of pertinent phrases. He speaks what would sounds to Western ears like a too long disquisition on the difficulties of farming. In a culture where all knowledge must be maintained within the realm of verbal interaction, the repetition of commonly known facts (such as the necessity of clearing new patches for crops and pouring libation to the gods) would not appear tedious to listeners, but would be heard instead as the means by which the semantic meanings are clarified and maintained, rules of behavior presented, and peoples' positions and viewpoints made known. The lengthy, interconnected, and context-dependent nature of oral speech is the norm in Kofi's culture. Laurence makes this explicitly clear when the father, after sounding garrulous by literate standards, proclaims that it is the ferryman who speaks too much, saying of the man that his "Tongue has diarrhea. Garrulity is an affliction of the soul" (83). We are not meant to view his statement as ironic. Ong's third distinction comes into play here as well. The copiousness or redundancy of oral expression serves the specific social need of the maintenance of knowledge. When Ong explains that writing establishes in the text a line of continuity outside the mind, we are immediately reminded of how unsettled Danquah is when he is without his newspaper,

for it is that written material which provides for him the social context that he cannot find in village life.

These three features of oral thought are again evident in the words of Okomfo Ofori, as he discusses the possible ramifications of the bridge being built on the river:

> "We do not know whether Owura will suffer his river to be disturbed," Okomfo Ofori said. "If he will not, then I think the fish will die from the river, and the oil palms will wither, and the yams will shrink and dwindle in the planting places, and plague will come, and river-blindness will come, and the snake will inhabit our huts because the people are dead, and the strangler vine will cover our dwelling places. For our life comes from the river, and if the god's hand is turned against us, what will avail the hands of men?". (87)

Evident here as well is the characteristic of traditionalist or conservative thought common in primary oral cultures. The priest's words may sound alarmist and apocalyptic to Western ears, but intellectual and social experimentation is hard for a society where the preservation of knowledge is caught up in repetitive and ritualistic maintenance of thought. In her essay "The Epic Love of Elmii Bonderii," Laurence makes the poignant and telling observation about Somali poetry that "the sheer force and sweep of it is sometimes reminiscent of Homer" (*Heart of a Stranger* 80). Ong claims that

> Homeric Greeks valued clichés because not only the poets but the entire oral noetic world or thought world relied upon the formulaic constitution of thought. In an oral culture, knowledge, once acquired, had to be constantly repeated or it would be lost: fixed formulaic thought patterns were essential for wisdom.(24)

Ofori's "clichés" that foretell social disaster are quite naturally invoked by the priest. The need for fixity in thinking results in a cultural will toward remaining in one place where spatial locatives, such as the grove, are relatively unchanging. In "The Tomorrow-Tamer," Emmanuel is a British, migrant worker who, once a job is completed, moves on, never returning to repeat his tasks. For Kofi, the thought of such a lifestyle "could not be borne" (101). Kofi yearns for a life of pattern and repetition, and in his distress decides to become a priest of the bridge, destined to repeat the rites and duties of that profession as he envisions them. In the end, when he seeks to emulate Emmanuel's lifestyle by planning to go to far off places where his abilities as a "bridgeman" will be recognized, he

meets his death. In "The Voices of Adamo," Captain Fossey is not unlike Emmanuel, as he is part of British colonial expansion, committed to a life of re-assignment and continual uprooting from temporary homes. In both his village and military service, Adamo is taught, and is entirely content with, the repetitive duties of his station. They are not only enough for him, but are absolutely essential to a peaceful existence. He is desperate to avoid change or further dislocation. Conversely, in "The Pure Diamond Man," Tetteh willingly leaves his traditional village and embarks on an entrepreneurial quest, counting on luck and the prevailing winds of commerce to carry him. However, it is his understanding of written language which most avails him. He stands opposite his brother, who remains close to the traditional ways of an oral culture, one that is immersed in the cyclical and site-specific life of farming. The linearity of Kofi's bridge, the rank and file of Adamo's army, and the shrewd symmetry of Tetteh's business advertisement contrast sharply with the rounded, sacred grove which the building of the bridge destroys, and the cyclical and ritualized existence of Adamo's and Tetteh's childhood home.

In such a society as this, elders are revered as the valuable repositories for the sum total of the culture's laws, customs, beliefs and history. Kofi's grandmother is described as the empty shell of a tortoise. Here, Laurence's symbolic technique is in play. As the grandmother blindly reaches out to touch Kofi, we realize that she is cut off from the future, is a relic of a dead age. She is only able to recite her genealogy in an ancient voice. Later, as Kofi becomes increasingly interested in keeping company with the British workmen, he realizes one night that he "had forgotten to greet or say farewell to the grandmother who sat, blind and small, in the darkened hut, repeating in her far-off voice the names of the dead" (56). The story traces Kofi's movement away from the oral world of his family and the village elders toward the literate world of the British workmen.

Ong's fifth, sixth, seventh and ninth distinctions involve, respectively, the fact that oral knowledge and expression exist close to the human lifeworld, are agonistically

toned, are empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced, and are always more situational than abstract. =The literate African clerk Badu arrives with the British workers prepared to act as translator. When he steps forward to address the elders, the dramatic scene most fully takes on meaning when the above four distinctions are kept in mind. "The fact that he (Badu) could speak their language did not make the villagers any less suspicious" (85). Their wariness is entirely warranted as the clerk speaks in a manner entirely befitting an alien, literate culture. "The stranger is like a child," Nana Ayensu says, "but the voice of an enemy is like the tail of a scorpion--it carries a sting" (85). The common and persistent physical hardships of life in many oral societies explain in part the high evidence of violence and suspicion inherent in many expressions. Ayensu's words are an invitation to exchange proverbs, and if Badu is not an enemy, proverbs may be exchanged in an introductory manner in order to situate each speaker and clarify intent. Badu does not respond to this singularly agonistic verbal challenge. Instead, when he begins to speak ,we are told of the movement of his eyes, that they flicker away to rest on an old gnarled tree, at which point he bawls "in a voice larger than himself" (85) the conditions whereby men may find work on the bridge project. He declaims that the building has the sanction of the government (which he says is "greater than any chief"), and that there will be no wasting of time by any one.

As discussed in my first chapter, El Saffar (when reiterating one of McLuhan's key concepts) states that the visual is the major cultural dominant in Western consciousness, and Olson points out how literacy calls into play a highly spatializing sensory modality, the eye, which has come to substitute for the ear (although he agrees with Tannen that a more useful way of distinguishing between mindsets based on predominantly either visual or aural experience is to view things in such dimensions as involvement and information--"speech often, but not always, emphasizing the former, writing the latter" (254). Badu's wandering eye signals the onslaught of his gross violation of appropriateness conditions, behaving in a way that the villagers find rude

and inexplicable. The clerk has cast aside the central tenet of oral communication, namely, that verbal exchange should be empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced. The oral seeks communal identification with the known--that is why Nana Ayensu begins with reference to children, enemies, and scorpions in order to find out where Badu and the British workmen will enter into an already understood scheme of existence. Expression residing close to the human lifeworld is in evidence here as the trappings of tangible and immediate daily experience is represented within the proverb. But Badu distances himself from the villagers, feeling "embarrassment at the backwardness of rural communities, now painfully exposed to the engineers' eyes" (86), and offers up what could well be a pre-prepared, written speech that he himself wrote or was given to present to the villagers. Absent from his speech is the additive, aggregative, and copious wording the elders themselves employ, and while the clerk's words refer to specific enough situations, the speech is clipped and abstracted--not situational--since the context for his proclamations is absent.

The context rests in the elusive constructs of European imperialist thought inaugurated a century earlier. The government men are simply said to be greater than the chiefs, the honour claimed to exist for the village in having the bridge built there is asserted rather than shown or proved, and it is declared that time, despite any local difficulties with the project, must not be wasted. In literate, "high technology cultures...everyone lives each day in a frame of abstract computed time enforced by millions of printed calendars, clocks and watches" (Ong, 97). The western conception of time is foisted upon the village and indigenous patterns of work are simply ignored. After the clerk has spoken,

> The men of Owurasu stood mutely with expressionless faces. As for the women, they felt only shame for the clerk's mother, whoever she might be, that she had taught her son so few manners. (86)

Badu walks off then, chasing after the Superintendent and speaking "in rapid stuttering English" (86).

The British build their work camp. We read that "the two settlements were as separate as the river fish from the forest birds. They existed beside one another but there was no communication between them" (90). Kofi is engaged to Akua, both families having arranged the joining. He sees the course he may follow and does not find it undesirable: "his life would move in the known way." All seems natural to him, yet, his feelings are ambivalent and he "[does] not know why he hesitated." Significantly, as he ponders his options, he and Akua walk "down the empty path together, slowly, in the dark, not speaking" (91). This dark is a figurative dark wherein the future's parameters for living may not be known. Kofi vaguely senses that major changes are taking place in the life of the village. He courageously rises to the challenge of re-inventing himself, becoming head of the village youth, seeking to join his traditional life with that of the workmen. He later decides he must become the attendant priest to the spiritual force residing in the bridge. The story is very much about Kofi's attempts to interpret one world in light of another; dramatic action takes place around the undeniable fact that to do so without an awareness of cross-cultural differences in perception is an impossible task.

The sacred grove is bulldozed and Kofi feels as "though his own bones were being broken," (92) such is the strength of the villagers' identification with their physical surroundings. "So the grove was lost, and although the pleas were made to gods and grandsires, the village felt lost, too, depleted and vulnerable. But the retribution did not come. Owura did not rise. Nothing happened. Nothing at all" (94). But t is clear by the close of the story that the villagers do not relinquish a belief in their gods, and by every indication the culture remains solidly guided by the traditional norms. How then do we explain (and critics of Laurence have been mute on this point) how, shortly after the bulldozing of the sacred grove,

> To the villagers, the river bank no longer seemed bald without the grove. Kofi could scarcely remember how the palms had looked when they lived there. Gradually he forgot that he had been afraid of the machines. Even the Europeans no longer looked strange. (94)

Laurence does not say that Kofi no longer was afraid of the machines but that he *forgot* how they had looked. As well, he can scarcely *remember* the sacred grove. Little time has passed since the grove was destroyed, so we may not interpret it as meaning that Kofi has simply lost these memories due to the passage of time. This development in part signals Laurence's early interest in the processes of memory, but the important point in this context is that the event perfectly depicts Ong's eighth distinction: oral cultures are homeostatic, remembering only what is of social relevance and only that which has an application to the present. The missionaries in the African fiction can never understand how the destroying of fetish objects and the disproving of superstitions fail to alter the culture. Persons in oral cultures do not reason away, through abstract, deductive logic, the beliefs on which they base their lives. If a thing is believed to have a purpose, it will be remembered. The palms that grew along the banks are no longer important, as the machines take on a greater meaning within the society.

Kofi becomes increasingly fascinated by Emmanuel, one of the workers who boasts often about his exploits traveling abroad. Ironically, even though Kofi does not speak English, the rhythms and emphases of Emmanuel's words approximate those of oral expression, and his physical gestures would likely match his spoken emphasis on listening:

> Someday I will have a car--you'll see. Ahh--it'll be blue, like the sea, with silver all over it. Buick--Jaguar--you don't know those names. Learn them, hear me? I'm telling them to you. Wait until you see me on the high steel. Then you'll know what an ironworker does. Listen--I'll tell you something--only men like me can be ironworkers, did you know that? Why? Because I won't fall. If you think you might fall, then you do. But not me. I'll never fall, I tell you that. (95)

It is not hard to see why Kofi becomes deeply intrigued by the worker. Kofi feels he understands "the power of the man, the fearlessness" (95). Certainly Emmanuel's brave-sounding words would present a strong contrast with the worrying tones of his father and the elders. The certainty Kofi hears in the man's voice convinces him, along with the prosperity that the project of the bridge has already brought to the village, that Emmanuel

must know of what he speaks. His emphasis on listening, on what must sound to Kofi like the sounding of power words such as "Buick" and "Jaguar," operates in concert with the seemingly supernatural assertion that he will not fall to give his speech an impressive quality.

Kofi's difficulty comes in that he is aware of only very small segments of the British, literate culture he would seek to join. He has no context for his new knowledge of construction work, and he awkwardly applies his culture's way of thinking to his new situation. Being of an oral society, he seeks meaning and spiritual significance in patterns and in the repetition of sacred duties and their attendant speech acts. Therefore, he seeks to become a priest of the bridge, believing, as do his people, that spirits reside in all things. He desperately seeks *spoken* affirmation of his role from Emmanuel:

> "I am one of the bridgemen," he said. "Say it is true."
> Emmanuel clapped him on the shoulder.
> "Sure," he said. "You are a bridgeman, bush boy.
> Why not?" (97)

Kofi is suspended between the life of a bridgeman and a "bush boy." He hangs about the *Hail Mary* bar, as alien to the culture of the men he drinks with as he is to the religion to which the bar's name refers. As he speaks with Emmanuel, he "[does] not perceive the difference in their outlooks" (101), and the time he spends in the bar further alienates him from his family. When Kofi gains a small understanding of the nature of Emmanuel's lifestyle, he is appalled. The idea of moving from place to place as migrant workers do, without, in his view, a chance to learn the nature of the environment one newly finds oneself in, is unthinkable--"the thought could not be borne" (101). Where would be the familiar patterns, words, and social contexts of home? In Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear*, Big Bear (a leader of an oral culture) is similarly appalled at the kind of British soldier who would forever travel, waging war without family and community at his side. Kofi grapples with his confusion, and eventually he thinks of a solution: he comes to believe that, as priest of the bridge, he would be able to mediate between the bridge's spirit and that of the river, maintain in the village the wealth the

project has brought, be able to offer new social roles to the younger men who have placed so much faith in him, and bring peace to the minds of his father and the elders. His effort is a heroic one, and his struggle becomes a symbol for the struggle of all oral cultures faced with a technologically advanced and invading culture that carries with it the baffling powers of literate thought.

Eventually Kofi gleans a small portion of the conceptual thinking that informs Emmanuel's culture. As he stares west from the top of the bridge, he sees a distant line:

> It was the new road. He had heard about it but he had not seen it before and had not believed it was really there. Now he saw that it would emerge soon here and would string both village and bridge as a single bead on its giant thread. (102)

Kofi glimpses the road, a symbol of linear, Western thought and literacy--the path to modernity. It is this line that will unite village and bridge. Knowledge such as Emmanuel possesses--cognition and understanding that is not based on localized social interaction, but on learning that is portative and independent--begins to enter in to Kofi's ken. Atop the bridge, when he considers the workers' migratory lifestyle for the second time, he realizes that

> now the thought could be borne. He was fearless, fearless as Emmanuel. He knew the work of the bridge. In the far places, men would recognize him as a bridgeman. The power of it went with him and in him. Exultant, he wanted to shout aloud his own name and his praises. (102)

The oral and the traditional are present in his urge to cry his pedigree and lineage aloud--he has not, at the last, really acquired a new way of thinking or a way to conjoin the two conceptual worlds--he cannot cross Jordan. Laurencean irony is heavy at the close of the story. Shamans, like the dead, must cross a bridge as they make their journey through the nether world (Eliade 484) in order to symbolically link heaven and earth, a link that was believed to have existed before the fall of man (the idea of such a fall not being exclusive to the Old Testament). As he proclaims his own personal transformation and epiphany, Kofi looks upward at the moment of his realization--a thing that "Emmanuel would never have done" (103)--and falls to his death. Kofi looks up because he is looking for the

spirit of the bridge. Spirits of objects were believed to appear often near, and in the shape of the object they inhabit (Idowu 174). Kofi, at the moment he realizes he must leave his home, is subsumed into his cultural element both literally, in that he drowns in the river near his village, and symbolically, in that he is consumed by the river god. In the superbly ironic ending, we find that "tales were woven around his name" (104)--Kofi is immortalized in the oral lore of his people, an oral tradition that, when confronted by a literate culture and its demands, must re-assert its forms of discourse. It is ironic, too, that his body is never found, for in many African cultures it is believed that if a person dies and is not given proper burial rites then that person is forever condemned to wander. Transcendentally, Kofi does leave, the power "with him and in him," and we are reminded of Ong's perception that in the transition from an oral to a literate culture one must die to continue living.

In "The Voices of Adamo," the protagonist is even more unaware of the forces which shape his life, less able even than Kofi to interpret his experiences in a manner consistent with the demands of a new culture. The title refers at once to the ancestral voices which alternately sound and are silent in Adamo's mind and to the formulation of his own voice or expression, that is, the way in which he comes to express himself through music in the British regimental band. Ong's discussions of drums and the interiority of sound are relevant here (and readers may again apply his nine features of oral thought with much success). Denny's discussion of decontextualized thought offers a perspective which allows us, along with Julian Jaynes' analysis of the oral and bicameral mind, to understand the perceptual standpoint from which Adamo views his world. What terrifies and haunts Adamo in adulthood is the possibility that the continuity of his life will be destroyed, that he will not know how to respond to the forces which affect him, resulting in his becoming lost, his identity amorphous. He fears becoming (as he does for a time) an entity roaming the wilderness bereft of social context and meaning--we read later that it is this fate and "not death that Adamo feared" (223). The story is primarily concerned with how Adamo

interprets his experience, what it is he brings to bear on sensory data to make meaning out of what he encounters. The "voices" are those beliefs and states of mind that guide him in this regard, ways of knowing and understanding that were engrafted upon his psyche during childhood. Adamo's character is constructed in such a way as to highlight several features of the oral mindset, and the British or British-trained persons that Adamo encounters supply, as is usual in the fiction, the literate counterpart to the oral mind.

As I shall show, it is the oral/literate dissimilitude that results in the deaths of Adamo and Captain Fossey; what they fail to perceive kills them. The first paragraph refers metonymically to Adamo's fate, speaking of "unknowable threats" (205), and suggesting that if a threat is known and understood then it may be dealt with. When we read that "Before Adamo knew anything he knew this, his mother's sun and shade" (205), we see for him a comfort in the known and the fact that his mother is able to stave off night fears and daily struggles--represented as the chill of the night and the heat of the day--with her sun and her shade. The known enemy may be countered, which is why the African characters throughout the fiction are reluctant to give their names to an enemy as it places them in their power.

As is the case in oral cultures, the identity of the self arises out of an identifiable role within the community, a role in which an individual may maintain a modicum of control over events by enacting the rituals and practical duties of his or her station. Laurence shows Adamo learning to fend off danger and making use of acquired knowledge; he learns to walk through the forest avoiding the thorns that would tear flesh and he is taught how to remain motionless in the presence of lethal snakes. Women and men are taught traditional roles early in life through apprenticeship, the girls preparing meals with their mothers and the boys watching the village blacksmith and other male adults at work.

Each aspect of his existence--his social role and means of sustaining himself, his fear of death resolved by the continuity offered by the ancestors, his place within a

broader cosmology wherein the lives of the gods and his people are inextricably bound up--are established by Laurence early on as she depicts the firm foundation that Adamo finds himself one day without:

> The days flowed slowly as the river, and when Adamo was no longer a child, his father taught him what he must know to wrench existence form the forest and yet not turn to vengeance the spirit that animated all things--the tree he felled, the plant he harvested, the antelope whose life he must take to feed his own. The forbidden acts and words were many, but Adamo dared not forget, for an offender endangered not only himself but the entire village, and that was the worst any person could do.
>
> "A man is a leaf," Adamo's father would say in his stern and quiet voice. "The leaf grows for a while, then falls, but the tree lives forever. One leaf is nothing. The tree is all."...he would speak one day with the calm voice of his father. (206)

In Adamo's childhood home, time flows in relation to natural cycles, not a Western conception of linear, calendar time. A balance is believed to exist within nature, an equilibrium which must not be disturbed by reckless action. The society lives and thinks in deep communion with the known and practical world, and the additive, aggregative and copious reiteration of knowledge is apparent in the forbidden acts and words which are described as "many" and later, we read that Major Appiah had observed "Adamo on the parade ground and had seen the boy's pleasure in the endless repetitions of the drill. He knew that Adamo followed regulations to the letter" (216). Adamo's sense of collective responsibility for maintaining the known order is strong and he looks forward to the day when he will speak with his father's voice that is characterized by a calmness born of knowledge.

The only thing that may enter into and threaten a peaceful and measured existence is death, but even this fact of life is incorporated into a system of belief and is thus made less ominous. Laurence writes of Adamo's father that "His own father and his mother had been dead for many years, but they were with him. He hears their guiding voices in the night wind..When Adamo's mother and father died, they ›uld not leave him either" (206). A brother and sister meet with an untimely death and "So Adamo learned fear, but

the fears were not the greater part. As long as the laws were kept, the...red earth...would not forsake him" (207).

When death or general mishap comes to the village each person wonders "who had been the one to cause by some offense such retribution" (207). All pieces of knowledge and understanding in such a society are valued, made use of, and are equal to one another in importance. In my first chapter, I discussed Denny's view of literate, decontextualized thought. Decontextualization takes place when thought processes foreground certain pieces of information while backgrounding or decontextualizing others. In large literate cities, persons no longer can share the same context or background information--the tribe is simply too large. In smaller agricultural or hunter-gatherer societies, a single social context can be maintained. Decontextualized thought is set up to provide quick reference and immediate context to listeners who may not be familiar with a speaker's background. Adamo, when questioned by Appiah as to the meaning of British military rituals such as shining buckles and shoes, answers " 'So all things will go well' ...calmly, as though there could have been no possible doubt about the matter" (217). For Adamo, all actions, including speech acts, take on a magico-religious significance that will maintain a life in which the divine and the practical are inextricably linked. All thought is fully contextualized. Denny describes higher differentiation in thought as being characterized by more distinctions within a thought unit--literate thinking--and higher contextualization by the proliferation of connections between one thought unit and many others--oral thinking. Appiah (an African trained in the British military) knows that if Captain Fossey had asked Adamo the question concerning the meaning of military routine, Fossey would have only expected a partially sincere "remark about the discipline or the smartness of the company" (216). The British soldiers do not look to matters such as the shining of boots in order to find meaning in the fact of their existence. They would likely look instead to religion (the Bible) or to writings that document the workings and perceived rightness of empire. In either case, they would be

looking to highly abstracted and written discussions that follow the intricacies of a single conceptual stance at a time. Adamo's thinking is highly contextualized, and the polishing of a brass knob may relate directly to the appeasement of a god.

Denny makes the point that "Humans do not change their habits of thought unless there are compelling reasons for doing so" (70). Although there are reasons why it would be advantageous for Adamo to understand the literate world, it is utterly impossible for him to change. There is no one around with a full enough understanding of the culture from which Adamo comes to help facilitate such a transition. Only the reader is privy to the disparities between the oral and literate cultures. Arguably, this is one of the greatest charges that Laurence levels at the interloping British: their understanding of indigenous culture and thought was so weak that they did not realize how impossibly outrageous their expectations were that all Africans would simply abandon their traditional oral cultures in favour of British literacy and Western notions of civilization.

When Adamo is sent away by his family to a neighboring village to escape the outbreak of disease, he is content for awhile.

> But one day when he went to wash himself in the river, he heard his mother's voice. The voice, gentle and persistent, spoke inside his head. *Adamo--where are you? Adamo--where are we?* (207, 208)

The question represents an insistence, that is, Adamo's strong instinct to situate himself within his own social order once more in order to maintain his sense of self: "A man needs a light, not so much against the outer darkness, as to be sure that he himself is really there" (208).

Adamo's hearing of voices is symbolic and is not an actual sounding by departed ancestors. I do not think that Laurence meant for the supernatural to be with us in this fictional instance. What is represented instead is a state of mind shaped by, and acting in accordance with the orality that shaped it. In his discussion on the interiority of sound, Ong focuses on "the unique relationship of sound to interiority when sound is compared to the rest of the senses. This relationship is important because of the interiority of

human consciousness and of human communication itself" (71). Sounds all register the interior structures of whatever it is that produces them. Laurence, in her title at the start and throughout the story, attests to this fact by referring to the voices of Adamo. When he is at peace with his universe he looks forward to adopting his father's voice. Near the end of the story when he is lost after his discharge, "He thought he cried out, but his voice made no sound" (222).

Adamo hears voices. These soundings are his beliefs and longings transmuted into familiar, human vocalizations. The memory of these are, to him, real, visceral, and powerful--they guide him and are ever with him. They are also the only means he has of mentally processing his emotional trauma. The family he must stay with in another village as a plague decimates his own keep saying "We have heard nothing," and Adamo finds himself in an intolerable situation. Without words from home and without the familiar context of village life give meaning to the words, he is lost--the internal voices have no way of being reinforced for as his external circumstances change they begin to lose their significance. A query comes to Adamo's mind in the guise of a voice ("*Where are we?*"") ; his only concept of community desparately needs to be situated.

The voices are not the delusions of a savage people. The pre-literate mind simply processes experience differently than the literate mind, a fact the English characters consistently fail to perceive throughout the African works. Julian Jaynes, in his book *The Origins of Consciousness* , discusses stages of consciousness in both early and late societies and remarks on what he calls the bicameral mind. He discerns an earlier stage of consciousness in which the human brain was strongly bicameral with the right hemisphere producing uncontrollable 'voices' attributed to the gods or ancestors which the left hemisphere then processed into speech. Jaynes believes that the advent of writing helped bring about the breakdown of this original bicamerality. He says that a bicameral and wholly oral psyche lacks introspection, certain kinds of analytic abilities, a concern with the will, and a sense of difference between the past and the future. Oral states of

consciousness may therefore seem bizarre to the literate mind. Adamo sees the past and present as one (confident as he is in the continuation of life that his belief in immortal ancestors affords him) and he is not self-aware or analytic in the Western sense of these terms.

As Ong points out, sight isolates while sound incorporates. The story of Adamo's life moves along a line between these two types of sensory experience. When persons hear, they gather sound--information--from all directions at once; one cannot help but be in the very midst of context. A firm center for existenceis established. The visual involves an outward focus, a placing of oneself in reference to points detahced from, and possibly irrelevant to the self. Adamo cannot separate the experience of the eye from that of the ear as literates can. He can hear the inner voices but not see--read--his discharge papers. Interiority and harmony of sensory experience is, as Ong states, characteristic of human consciousness, and without mental harmony, an interior condition, the psyche is not healthy.

> For oral cultures, the cosmos is an ongoing event with man at its center. Man is the *umbilicus mundi,* the navel of the world. Only after print and the extensive experience with maps that print implemented would human beings, when they thought about the cosmos or universe or "world", think primarily of something laid out before their eyes, as in a modern printed atlas, a vast surface or assemblage of surfaces (vision presents surfaces) ready to be "explored."....A sound-dominated verbal economy is consonant with aggregative (harmonizing) tendencies rather than with analytic, dissecting tendencies. (73)

When Adamo begins to adapt to life in the British regimental band, voices still sound in his consciousness. They are changed voices, soundings more attentuated to his new environment:

> Now when Adamo heard, as he still occasionally did in sleep, the muttering river, the soft slow woman voice, the voices of gods and grandsires, he would be frightened by their questioning and mourning, until they faded and a new voice, high and metallic, alien but not unknown, gained command.
> *Here, Adamo. You are here.* (218)

Once in harmony with his new surroundings (he perceives social links between his military duties and his personal systems of belief) he enjoys a connectedness--voices are

still heard and he finds expression through both verbal and musical means. Earlier, when returning to his dead village, the critical connection between his sense of self and his surroundings is endangered by "unknowable threats." The voices are silent then and he enters the amorphous disconnectedness he most fears.

When a fellow band member, Lartey, is speaking with Adamo he questions him about Captain Fossey and Adamo gives the following reply: "He spoke and many listened...and then I was a drummer among drummers. His word has power--that I know" (218). Adamo reveals here the importance he places on oral/aural experience, and it becomes clear to the reader that he translates speech acts into a personal mythology. The complaint we make of someone who is "all talk and no action" would be incomprehensible to Adamo--in his mind, talk *is* action. Twice during his life, a series of spoken words magically, powerfully assign him a meaningful role in society: first, the words of his father teach him how he must behave in the context of village life, and second, the words of Captain Fossey make possible his admittance to military life. His printed, silent discharge papers condemn him to death--he cannot communicate with a piece of paper, nor it with him. We are reminded of Plato's complaint that he could not argue with the printed word, that it remained static and a destroyer of memory. Adamo has an excellent memory, the memory of one raised in an oral culture. He says to Fossey: "You will tell me, and I will learn everything that must be done" (213).

It is, of course, highly significant that Adamo becomes a drummer in the British regimental band. I discussed in my first chapter Ong's analysis of African talking drums, what he terms the most developed speech surrogates found in the world. We read that

> Adamo and the drum found one another. His fingers sensed some way of expressing what his mind and speech could only grope after and fail to grasp. The strange drum uttered to him the voice he now heard only in dreams, the sorrowing of someone once inexpressibly dear to him, someone whose face he could not now visualize however hard he tried. (221)

We are reminded of Ong's claim that "The sophisticated drum languages of Africa have been developed within an oral economy of thought and expression...drums exemplify and

often informingly exaggerate the characteristics of the oral lifeworld, or of primary orality" (95-96). Adamo would be drawn to an instrument that was capable of evoking his oral upbringing. African words are distinguished between according to tone. Drummers in oral cultures think of the words they beat out as almost wholly represented by the tones, by sound--the sounding of the word is the signifier. Adamo retains this ear for tonal differentiation, never really coming to terms with even Pidgin English, but excelling all the while at drumming. When Captain Fossey tries to inform Adamo of his imminent discharge, Adamo attempts to understand by listening to his superior's tone of voice and by observing his physical gestures. But Fossey assumes he is speaking to a fellow literate, a reader and speaker of English, and Adamo wrongly comes to the conclusion that all his Captain is doing is warning him not ever to play in a highlife band (in fact, Fossey suggests the very opposite). When Adamo is handed his discharge papers, the incomprehensible *logos* condemns him to a decontextualized wandering, an intolerable development for Adamo which results in his murderous actions.

The voice of Captain Fossey is heard by Adamo as "high-pitched compared to the low hoarseness of African voices" (218) and we read that Fossey "had the uncomfortable suspicion that his fellow officers regarded his branch of military activity as not quite manly" (214). Adamo finds in Fossey, in a purely tonal sense, the voice of his absent mother. Before, her words had power to assist him, and then Fossey's "word has power--that I know." An abstraction outside spoken word language--music, be it the band or the tones of speech--is all that unites Adamo and Fossey. As I have said, the aural difference between male and female voice rests at the heart of drum language. High tones are considered female, low tones as male. Although it appears to characters in the story that Adamo has approached, and to some extent joined the ranks of newly literate Africans, the opposite is actually true. Only in outward appearance, to the experience of the eye, does Adamo appear to have adapted to British ways. Adamo is akin to drum language itself; both are highly dependent on context for meaning.

As Kofi becomes, at least for a time, one of the bridgemen, Adamo becomes "a drummer among drummers" (214). But how Adamo interprets the rules he "scrupulously obeys" will be what truly defines his sense of place. The fact that when others speak to him he "was never quite clear about the meaning...(taking) it on faith, sensing from the voice tone what response was expected" shows that Adamo remains firmly in the world of the oral. In only one way may he bridge that gap: "In the years of Adamo's service, the learning of highlife was the most important innovation that occurred" (219). Adamo finds the persons in highlife bars untrustworthy looking, but his hesitation toward such a place may have dissipated if he had understood that Captain Fossey suggested he go there. There, amongst people who may have been more capable than the men in the regiment of understanding the nature of Adamo's perception of things, a real change in his thinking might have taken place, one that would have allowed him to adapt to life in a literate society. However, this transition does not take place because of the miscommunication between Adamo and Fossey. Adamo lives only in his childhood home and then in the British camp, and the gap between the conceptual bases from which each culture operates is too wide to bridge. After realizing that he is once again without community, Adamo walks once more at night hearing the "Tribes of white egrets" sing out and "the families of frogs in the nearby lagoon (that) could be heard" and "the thin screeching of the cicada clan" sounding in the *niim* branches. But for Adamo

> There were no voices to be heard, neither around him nor inside his head. There were no people in this place, no known voices. None to tell or guide, none even to mourn. Only his own voice which had strangely lost the power of sound, his silent voice splitting his lungs with its cry. (222)

When he kills Captain Fossey, it is all he can do to fend off the void in which all meaning is lost. He believes that with his father's knife he may "spill" the power of Fossey, the power that may allow him "to stay" (Adamo's last, desperate plea to Appiah) or that will condemn him to exile. Adamo, a tragic figure, believes he will be allowed to remain and perform whatever ritual is required to make restitution. His punishment for murder will

be, however, capital, and an absent, written. Western law will silence him utterly. Adamo is arguably the least literate and most tribal figure in the collection of stories and Captain Fossey stands opposite him as a wholly literate, dialectical antithesis. Major Appiah has synthesized his experiences in the two cultures to the extent that he may prosper. Still, at the close of the story, his awareness of both worlds is heavy upon him. He is sickened by the fact that he may only honestly bring peace to Adamo through a lie, an ironic play on words: "You can stay, Adamo. You can stay as long as you live."

In *Long Drums and Cannons* , Laurence says of Obi, the central character in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease,* that he feels distant from his parents, yet finds himself moved by the very ways in which they are old-fashioned (107). Obi, educated in England, must reconcile his traditional background with his modern British education. It will be difficult for him for as Ong claims, "a literate person cannot fully recover a sense of what the word is to a purely oral people" (12). Ong has also taken note of Achebe's novel and draws attention to a scene in which the one man who knew how to read in an Ibo village is said to hoard all printed matter that he could obtain, anything from books to advertisements and receipts, all because the printed word seemed at once magical and remarkable to him (93). In "The Pure Diamond Man," Tetteh ascribes the benevolent and magical force of what he sees as his luck to his discovery of the written word and of the power that word has to generate wealth. He is distant from his parents, but rather than being moved by the ways in which they are old-fashioned, he would have them act "backward" intentionally to appease the anthropological eye of Philip Hardacre, a man willing to pay to see ancient, tribal rituals acted out in earnest. Tetteh is the only central figure in the African fiction to traverse the gulf between cultures, but by the close of the story, the reader senses that Tetteh has firmly set aside residual concerns for culture or for the political--he is solely concerned with turning a profit.

Tetteh sits and relates an event to his friend Daniel, a "been-to" African who has acquired an education in England. As Tetteh and Daniel converse, we read that

> Their mother-tongues were different, so they spoke together in English, and Tetteh's speech, as haphazard as ever, made Daniel wonder a little uncomfortably if his own careful precision gave an effect of pomposity. (182)

The political is manifest in the levels of English language capability that each man possesses; Daniel believes that offense may be taken if Tetteh feels his manner of speaking is exclusive and elitist. Elevated language would be a slight from the man Tetteh later says went "off to England for college and to learn drinking of sherry and other dainty potables" (183). The difference in their speech patterns is most vividly portrayed in the story's opening lines. These reveal the cultural underpinngs of each type of expression as well:

> "One year ago, when I was young," said Tetteh, "I was always thinking I am Luck's very boy."
> Daniel smiled. "Scientifically, you realize, a consistently lucky person is an impossibility. You didn't honestly believe you were an exception?" (182)

Again, at the outset of one of Laurence's African short stories, the binary opposition of Western literacy and African orality is quickly introduced. While Daniel is in truck with western positivist principles of scientific understanding, Tetteh, in his Pidgin English, aligns himself with superstition. The opposition, once brought into play, is depicted as false, and a truer understanding of the African culture in transition resides in the minutiae of the characters' thoughts, in details that reveal perceptual/conceptual mindsets and the motivations and actions that come of them.

It is unlikely that Daniel could politically incense Tetteh since the man is interested in the commercial power of the written word rather than its spoken counterpart his traditional society reveres. Nor is Tetteh interested in what Ghanaians in the emerging, newly literate and pro-independence African culture see as the political power of words. Tetteh learns at an early age that words may benefit him financially. The orally communicated and exaggerated story of his perennial good luck paid him dividends in that local employees hired him for small jobs hoping that his rumored good fortune would rub off. The adult Tetteh, now moving about in literate city society, pays

closer attention now to *written* language, "believing" in it rather than simply considering it a tool. As he and Daniel sit in the Paradise Chop-Bar, we read that

> Tetteh glanced out the window at the pink and white lettering of the chop-bar sign...He tilted to the back of his head a green fedora with three round button-pins--*Freedom & Justice, Nothing-With-Man,* and *Amaryllis Light Ale*..."This very place," he cried, "which the sign telling us is some proper heavenly dwelling. You are a believer in signs, Daniel? I am believing in all such things. (184)

For Tetteh, the rallying cry of his country's independence movement--"Freedom and Justice"--may be tagged on his hat and exist there easily alongside an advertising slogan There is no irony or contradiction in this act; he is primarily interested in language as a means to an end, namely, personal prosperity, and he is eager to display to everyone his familiarity with forms of written expression. That he says he "believes" in signs in much the same way he believes in a guiding spirit he calls "Uncle," indicates the residual impulse in newly literate cultures to attribute paranormal qualities to writing.

As he talks with Daniel, preparing to tell of his encounter with Philip Hardacre, Tetteh remarks on the fact that Daniel is a "big newspaper man," a parlayer of words in an increasingly politicized climate. He mentions that Doctor Samuel Etroo and the politician Darku ignore Tetteh when they run into him, and it becomes clear to the reader that Tetteh is remarking on the slights he has received for his earlier, illiterate standing. Tetteh is now deeply intrigued by "heavenly signs" that offer clues to ways he might be able to make money. He says to Daniel "I dash you my dream, free, for nothing, and now I am in your power" (185). He refers here to the traditional oral belief that if you give your name to an enemy you will be in that person's power, but he makes reference to this ancient belief in monetary terms, suggesting that he will relinquish power over himself if the terms are acceptable. Given that he leaves behind his traditional culture in order to do business with the British, his words are highly revealing.

Philip Hardacre later complains to Tetteh:

> Pidgin English--a depravity, if I may say so. This highlife caper. Signs advertising political meetings and anti-malarial pills. All of it so dreary. The Lord knows England is drab enough. I though it would be different

> here...I've read extensively about the structure of tribal society here. Always had a personal interest in this country, owing to my family's finances. Your ancient culture had a weird magnificence to it...To me, those things still constitute the true Africa. But how to discover it? That's the maddening part. I've been in villages, but people clam up so. I found one revolting crone who purported to be a fetish priestess, but she turned out to be only another Bible spinner. Stabbed verses with a meat skewer. Didn't read them, of course--gave them to her clients, to swallow like pills. (187)

Hardacre makes note of the city's signs as does Tetteh, but they disturb Hardacre since he seeks a more primitive version of African society in which to indulge his anthropological impulses. It is ironic that he claims his interest in African culture is a result of his family's finances, an enterprise (diamond mining) that involved the appropriation of African resources. He does not see that it is the action's of his country that have supressed and transformed the very culture he wishes had endured. It is also ironic that once he does find a highly traditional African (the fetish priestess) his experience of her is tainted by the fact that her fetish is printed matter biblical verses. He will not even admit that much of literacy to enter into his vision of the "true" Africa, even though the woman otherwise behaves exactly as a fetish priestess.

Tetteh rides the bus to his old village. "King Kong" and "God Save Souls" are printed in capital letters on the back of the bus and symbolically the printed word arrives in the traditional village. His plan to deceive Hardacre fails and the inability of his family to act out the old rituals for even a short time represents the impossibility of a return to traditional ways once the future has made itself felt. The story ends with a visitation by what Tetteh believes is his guardian spirit--his luck--but the visitation comes in the form of words. Tetteh borrows Daniel's pen (the act is highly significant) to write out an advertisement for his new business idea. The idea is a brilliant one. He knows there are white men about whose tender feet must suffer as do those of Reverend Quarshie's. He realizes there is a market for Bonsu's herb cure and that he, Tetteh, could act as distributor. By calling the remedy "All-African" he appeals to the belief among the British that the Africans exist somehow closer to nature. Reasonably then (in the British

view) Africans would have access to herbs and roots from which to fashion a balm. He is smart enough to include the word "luck" in his ad, a word that has stood him in good stead previously, and he even incorporates a pun to appeal to the witty among the literate: "*sole* distributors." Tetteh walks the border between a literate and a non-literate culture, seeking to forge a connection that will be to his benefit.

Ultimately, Tetteh succeeds. However, as will become clear in my discussion of *This Side Jordan,* a basic understanding of written English is not enough to gain financial security in a society mediated and largely controlled by foreign interests. The British institute and exert a great influence upon a hierarchy of literacy, benefitting from the inequities between classes and between Africans and non-Africans. In this broader context, it appears likely at the close of the story that Tetteh will become little more than a huckster.

Laurence, believing that "Fiction relates to life in a very real way" (Kroetsch 55), sought to portray African culture in her fiction in such a way so as to bring about a change in Western attitudes toward Africa. She seeks to instill in a reader the belief that all interpretations of experience are subjective. In so doing, she hopes to bring about the realization that one must attempt to locate and understand the perceptual seat of the other rather than presume (on the basis of perceived differences between cultures) one's own standards to be morally superior. In "Godman's Master," Godman echoes Laurence's philosophy:

> Moses put his head down onto his hands.
> "There is more to freedom," he said, "than not living in a box."
> Godman fixed ancient eyes upon Moses.
> "You would not think so if you had ever lived in a box." (155)

The refusal to seek an understanding of others, coupled with the inherent cruelty of acting without regard for such knowledge, resides at the heart of the European woman in "A Gourdful of Glory." She does not perceive (nor does she seem to care) that the pathetic Mammii Ama, an aging market woman, uneducated and illiterate, defines her world and her experience through the articulation of power words. Mammii Ama misinterprets

various events in the political life of the city because she maintains the traditional belief that words carry transmundane power that will shape circumstances. A phrase, ritualistically repeated and heartily believed in, will bring good fortune. The reader is left to wonder why the European woman would take such great pains to rub the African woman's face in the realization that independence will not bring financial relief to her meager existence. Is her loathing of African consciousness so strong that she seeks to subdue and humiliate it even at the moment independence is proclaimed? The European woman is not depicted as wealthy by accident. Laurence wishes the reader to see that the primary reason for the European presence in Africa is monetary, economically motivated and singularly ruthless. To be sure, poverty would have existed in Ghana whether or not the British were there. But the economic subjugation that continued after independence--the roots of which are hinted at in the short stories and given full articulation in the novel--constituted an insidious remnant of a colonial age that continued to affect Africans adversely: "The clank of the coin in the fare-box...drowning the heart's drums" (243).

Chapter Three

Crossing Jordan: Residual Orality and the Hierarchy of Literacy

> The better the technology, the less efficient the human use of it.
>
> --August Fruge

In her memoir, Laurence readily acknowledges a particular weakness in her apprentice novel *This Side Jordan,* when she writes that her mother

> felt I had put my heart and soul into a portrayal of the African characters and had, unconsciously or deliberately, made stereotypes of the whites. For a novel, that was not good enough. (*Dance on the Earth* 117)

The structural frame of the novel is based on a sustained parallelism that enables Laurence to contrast alternately the African and European social groups, but which imposes the necessity of doing so throughout the work. Once the pacing of the contrasts is established, focus switches from African to European perspectives unremittingly, even though a sustained look at the more developed African characters might have made for better fiction. For the narrative to move back and forth between simple categories of colonizer/colonized, white/black, literate/illiterate, rich/poor, achieves what is, at first, a powerful contrast, but one that soon becomes plodding and predictable. In response to this aspect of the novel, Clara Thomas calls the work "an architectural novel, built from the outside, in contrast to *The Stone Angel,* an organic one, growing and flowing from the inside" (95). Nathaniel's interior monologues, which are introduced by a dash and do not have their counterpart amongst the British characters, seem a contrived obtrusion into the otherwise steadily maintained third-person voice. Such interior voice can work to great effect, but these monologues do not have a stream-of-consciousness quality to them that might offer a level of defamiliarization to a reader or a more lyrical quality to the prose. Rather, interior moments such as "When I was a boy I used to swim in a green pool" (74)

utterly maintain the quality of standard prose narrative. The strength of this novel does not lie in formal experimentation.

If the narrative and the characterization are in some respects lacking, the complexity and intensity of certain motifs that fuel the dramatic action are not. The figuring of residual orality and developing literacy is particularly prominent in the work and is integral to what I believe to be a portrait of economic imperialism that is at once insightful and prescient. Laurence's evocation of the halting and manipulated spread of literacy in pre-independence Ghana is intricately linked to the economic relationship evolving at the time between African states and the rest of the world. It is a surprise that critics have not noted how Laurence's portrayal of the economic role literacy played in the emerging African states clearly lays bear the foundations for (and predicts the development of) global and neo-imperialist treatment of many nations since 1960, the year the novel was first published. To be sure, Laurence focuses to a great extent on the psychological minutiae of her characters, their spiritual and emotional trials brought on by *exterior* circumstances. But the factors which affect the lives of her characters both operate on, and may be seen to arise out of the *interior* spaces of personal belief, bias, and perceptual orientation. Social factors may be seen to have influence on characters, this influence becomes the personal or the inner, then the personal becomes the political, giving rise to more social factors which again affect the individual. This is why the work remains a strong piece of historical fiction--it depicts the realm of human interaction as a dynamic system, the complexities of which are numerous enough that we should not pretend to a full understanding. Since 1950, economic interests outside Africa have managed to manipulate the spread of literacy on that continent in a way that has best served corporate aims. By carefully laying out the nature of the new British/African commerce, as advocated by the likes of Cameron Sheppard, and by bringing into high relief the biases and assumptions that inform the players in each camp, Laurence writes

not only about oral/literate difference, but articulates the nature of the nascent, neo-imperialist powers of the day.

Simply put, by controlling levels of literacy and practical knowledge within a given work force, international economic interests can shape a work force to meet current industrial needs. Such actions are not always in line with efforts to improve worker conditions. I wish to make clear that I am not suggesting that corporate interests that hinder the spread of literacy always do so as a matter of policy. There may not be any deliberate attempts by corporations to accomplish this end. However, there are exceptions, as well as the proliferation of other policies that affect the dissemination of knowledge at least incidentally. A refusal to assist in the efforts of governments and organizations to relieve extreme inequities amongst a given work force does, in the eyes (and ears) of this critic, constitute an ethical lapse.

At the time of this writing, in 1994, North America has seen the negotiation and implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Corporate interests all over the continent successfully lobbied for the agreement, as it would enable companies to re-locate their businesses across national borders to areas with cheaper taxation and, more importantly, with cheaper labour pools. Highly literate workers either pursue upward mobility within business and class structures or are at least capable of efficiently organizing collective bargaining processes to ensure that low-level jobs pay reasonably. Workers who are poorly educated and illiterate (or nearly so) become part of a financial equation wherein their status, if perpetuated, is integral to the continued success of some enterprises. Today, many labour pools in Mexico (which many businesses in the United States and Canada have already moved to take advantage of) bear a remarkable resemblance demographically to workers in pre- and post-independence Ghana, both historically and as they are portrayed in *This Side Jordan.* Once independence becomes a political inevitability, the executives of the fictional Accra Textile Branch of Allkirk, Moore and Bright decide to employ African workers in a bid to mollify nationalist

sentiments. But this action, to a large extent, is a public relations ploy, the cost of which is offset by the workings of the hierarchy of literacy as propagated by British business and locally run schools in Africa throughout the colonial era. The British characters insist that Africans are only qualified for low-level positions, they do little to train them for any others, and then through social coercion and company policy, seek to instill the belief amongst Africans that rising up in the ranks through a system of promotions is a necessarily long process. The situation for the British firms will be such, if they succeed in their aims, that they can stave off nationalist economics and outright nationalization of business interests, and continue to control profits in an economic enterprise situated on foreign soil.

In the first nine chapters of the novel, Laurence depicts the type of British administrator living and working abroad who is loath to give up the systems and means of colonial oppression favoured in the early part of the twentieth century. James Thayer and Major Bedford Cunningham are the type of imperialist that Laurence was ever at pains to depict. Focused as she was on bringing out the qualities she admired least in these persons--their desire to "seek some kind of mastery in a place where all the cards were stacked in their favour" (*The Prophet's Camel Bell* 26)--she risks stereotypical characterization. However, any unconvincing representation of the British administrators may be seen as less so if it is understood that Laurence needed them to function in the way that British foreign policy itself so often did--seeking at all points to maintain a social, intellectual, and economic power over the Africans after outright political control was no longer a possibility. The British characters have an almost allegorical function at times, operating as foils to the more complexly developed African characters. In the discourse of the new imperialism, solidly represented in the character, words, and opinions of Cameron Sheppard, there is evident a new approach to Africa, one still informed by the same national self-delusion that British economic interests abroad were logical and eminently reasonable enterprises that were always of great benefit to

"backward" lands. In fact, their very presence constituted a hegemony motivated by economic factors, one seldom mediated by ethical considerations.

We read that

> Cameron Sheppard had none of the qualities Johnnie had once admired in James and Bedford. He had to be admired for another reason: he knew exactly what he wanted and he was going after it, methodically, scientifically, and without the slightest scruple. He didn't ask if a thing was right or wrong. He only asked if it could be made to work. (169)

During the interview in which Johnnie betrays the secrets of his fellow administrators to Cameron Sheppard in a desperate attempt to gain a promotion and thereby be allowed to remain in Africa, Sheppard's words are so revealing that I am compelled to quote them here at length. Laurence's characterization of Sheppard is not stereotypical simply because it is one-dimensional; functioning in an almost neo-marxist construct, Sheppard's character is perfectly self-contained and is integral to the novel's thematic exploration of neo-imperialism. He is a simple man motivated by specific forces to accomplish specific ends. His character's articulation of the new British colonialism allows the reader to perceive the direction the colonial impulse was taking at a certain point in history, a direction that, I shall show shortly, may be best understood by tracing the proliferation of literacy in a traditional society. Referring to Africans, Sheppard says that "It's essential for our own self-preservation that we should understand them, though, but it must be an objective study, without the personal involvements of hate or love" (169-70). The new British imperialism becomes here much more ominous than the open, naked aggression of an earlier era as represented by James Thayer. The post World War II Britain becomes a faceless economic force motivated by an almost robotic bid for the resources of other countries:

> "Take independence, for example. It's an inevitable development here, and there would be no point in our burying our heads in the sand about it. The question is--what can we salvage from the whole thing? The British government's taken the only possible course in agreeing to grant Independence to the colony. Certainly, we all know the Africans aren't ready. But what was the alternative? To do as the French have done in North Africa, and have an interminable rebellion on our hands? Or as the

> descendants of the Boers have done in South Africa--segregate black and white and create such racial hatred and tension that civil war is almost bound to result one day?...But this country--well, independence was bound to happen first here. All the conditions were right. No white settlers have ever been allowed. The country is rich in resources--cocoa, timber, gold, palm-oil. And there exists a certain minimum of educated Africans who can take over. We did the only sensible thing. We gave in gracefully. And the new Ghana will probably stay in the Commonwealth because of it. Maybe they'll make a mess of things at first, but it can't be helped. We've made them a partner in the Commonwealth, and let's hope it keeps 'em happy for awhile. We've cut our losses. We've salvaged what we could from the maelstrom." (170-71)

The irony here is that it is the Africans who are trying to "salvage" a fair economy in the wake of an aggressive, colonial maelstrom. The British, after some financial losses, need only seek to maintain lucrative economic ties with Ghana. Sheppard's mentality revolves solely around a national cost/benefit analysis. He reveals the reasons why Ghana was so readily granted independence: in the face of insuppressible nationalist sentiments, in a country rich with resources, why not offer independence, membership in the Commonwealth, and increased African labour in British firms as a way of distracting nationalists from the fact that the foreign interests are still functioning as prime economic determinants in their own country?

Nathaniel is a teacher, a man considered a maverick in his native village, which he leaves to become increasingly literate and decidedly Western in his lifestyle. He seeks financial security and hopes to teach well enough at the African-run Futura Academy that he is granted pay raises and his students are able to find rewarding positions in the emerging, independent country. The novel is essentially about how his aims are frustrated, how he is torn between two cultures, and, more broadly, about the forces that make it so difficult for Africans to move from their traditional cultures into the hierarchical structures of literate capitalist society.

Almost all the characters in the novel declare a great anxiety over their futures, over how they will continue to survive, and the level at which they will reside in the class structure. At the top of the hierarchy is Cameron Sheppard. He does not reside in Africa,

is British born and bred, and is up for promotion to senior partner in the lucrative British textile firm. Next , we see the rising star of Johnnie Kestoe, who is, at first, a subordinate to the other British managers whom he deviously manages to supplant. He is young and represents the new British imperialism that functions opposite Victor Edusei and the new African nationalism. At the end of the novel, they must work together in the firm in a position of mutual distrust and antagonism. James Thayer and Bedford are well-paid administrators who look to suffer a decline in their fortunes as it becomes inevitable that they are expendable, even in Africa finally, as their talents are few and their politics based on an outdated construct of earlier imperialist thought. Their future is presented by Laurence as bleak, in a passage that predicts how Cora and Bedford will fare back in England "in some hateful poky little flat...(where they) could not get the coal fire lighted" (130). Laurence here encourages the reader to set aside older anti-imperialist attitudes (since these, too, may be obsolete) in order to perceive more fully the nature of new manifestations of imperialism on the African continent.

The most prosperous positions in Accra society (with the exception of Victor's at the close of the novel) belong to the British. Next down on the scale is Jacob Abraham Mensah, the African owner of the penurious Futura Academy. Africans, desperate to improve their lot, naively attend his school in the hopes that a fleeting association with literacy will bring them great fortune. While Mensah realizes his graduates' ambitions will likely go unrealized, he himself maintains the desperate, unrealistic hope that the school will one day be certified by the government and therefore be eligible for funding. He is a superficial man concerned mostly with the appearance of a highly literate and effective school, with commemorative plaques, and his own displays of proper English grammar. He wastes money on expensive office furnishings and his own clothes, while the needs of the school go unattended to. Nathaniel is poorly paid and shares a great deal in common with the boys he hopes to see find positions for in the British textile firm: all are kept at their respective levels of low-level wage-earning by the foreign-imposed

standards of literacy and job skills. He failed his Cambridge School Certificate examination, a fact that Mensah brings up each time Nathaniel asks for a raise. The boys are only offered jobs as messengers because of their inability to write business letters and to file properly. In the end, Sheppard declares to Johnnie that the boys Nathaniel sent him for the jobs prove that "boys from secondary schools simply wouldn't do. If we had more time to train them, yes. But as it is, we've got to go further up. I mean the university here" (277). Enormous segments of the Accran population are thus excluded from consideration for middle- to high-level jobs in the firm. While British administrators berate the Africans for their lack of literacy, and declare the necessity of literacy and other features of "civilization" to enter in and transform African culture, there are no efforts by the firm to ensure this this takes place, to train Africans for the jobs--only universities and overseas schools operated by the British produce the caliber of applicant desired by the firm. To say there is not enough time to train them is to place priority on profit rather than on the "civilizing process" they expect to happen on its own.

In his afterword to *This Side Jordan,* George Woodcock states that the novel is a "valuable fictional document of the times" (287). He cites Laurence's attempts to represent the commingling of past and present in the minds of Africans of that period and the spirited presentation of British, mid-twentieth-century paternalism as evidence of the novel's political insight. However, Woodcock claims that what the novel predicts will take place is the post-independence oppression of Africans at the hands of other Africans. To some extent, this prediction has been borne out, and is strongly alluded to in the confrontation between Nathaniel and Victor, where the journalist heatedly argues and predicts that in newly independent African states, internecine battles will break out where people who were once slaves will vie for ascendancy, "to be the man who holds the whip" (118). But to a far greater extent, it is the depiction that develops throughout the novel of a new African society wherein citizens are subjugated by foreign economic policies that control or influence levels of literacy in their favour, effectively capitalizing on the slow

change from an oral to a literate society. In the decades that followed Ghanaian independence, the way the world treated Africa may be seen to have arisen out of a set of attitudes meticulously laid out by Laurence in her apprentice novel.

In his book *Illiteracy: A World Problem,* Sir Charles Jeffries describes how the British conducted a campaign against illiteracy in Northern Nigeria during the 1950s. In his account he states that,

> Historically, [Nigeria] had been isolated until this century from contact with Europe, whereas the people of the coast had long and fruitful connections with the other world. But, with the breakdown of that isolation due to the modern development of communications *and the need of other countries for the agricultural and mineral products of the land,* the north could no longer afford to be in a "backward" condition. One of the first necessities was to deal with the problem of illiteracy...[because] opportunities opened up to unscrupulous literates to exploit their illiterate brethren....If such a situation is allowed to continue, there must result a widening gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. (45, 48, my emphasis)

Clearly, we have here not only what D. P. Pattanayak would call an "oppressive theorization," but a rationalization that "provided levers to bureaucrats and managers, policymakers and planners, (the chance) to perpetuate oppression in the name of literacy and modernization" (Pattanayak, 105). That Jeffries chooses to cite the need of *other countries* for the agricultural and mineral products of the land, instead of suggesting that Nigerian interests might be best served by increased literacy, or that a healthy interdependence based on trade might benefit both Europe and Nigeria, shows the tenacity of the imperialist assumptions and biases that so often underlie such writings. Jeffries refers to the prospect of Nigerians exploiting their less literate brethren, a development that in all likelihood will take place. Laurence gives us Jacob Abraham Mensah, an African ready to capitalize on the desperation of illiterate society members. But Jeffries makes no mention in his book of the British role in the situation, as both the historical agent of the often insensitive and disastrous introduction of literacy to Africa and as a long-time perpetrator of class inequities.

Efforts to increase literacy in Northern Nigeria met with little success, the number of adult illiterates in Nigeria rising from about 13 million in 1950 to only 18 million in 1962. Abrasively, Jeffries blames this fact on Nigerian leaders who, he says, became more concerned with a campaign for independence than with "domestic social concerns." Adverse domestic conditions, from the nationalist perspective, arose from externally imposed economic and class structures that maintained a highly undesirable *status quo*. Jeffries' own words offer evidence that this is so, as he goes on to describe how literacy became an acquisition, a commodity or an asset within Nigerian society--not a universal privilege. He posits his view that adult education programs should be "graduated in stages to correspond to the reader's growth in proficiency" (49). As Greenfield and others I shall shortly cite argue, such "proficiency levels" are dictated by pre-existing class backgrounds that privilege or adversely affect learners. Growth in proficiency is pre-determined to a great extent, and in most cases will be limited. Ivan Illich notes that persons in such a structure of learning know the level at which they "dropped out" (30). These persons then take up a position in an economic hierarchy commensurate with their abilities but may not necessarily possess the skills or knowledge to increase their economic and class standing. Such exactly is the case with Nathaniel. While class differences and economic disparities remain unchanged, the spread of a limited amount of literacy would increase exports and profits, keep expenditures low, and keep nationalist sentiment somewhat at bay. It is not cynical to wonder if the British interest in reversing the "backwardness" of Northern Nigeria would have been of the same intensity if lucrative trade relations were not a possibility.

Even the most cursory reading of contemporary writings concerned with the problem of raising literacy levels may be seen to contain the implicit assumption that literacy ought to be developed only in concert with economic interests that, it is asserted, will benefit first and foremost the new reader/worker. Consider the following passage

from *Adult Literacy and Economic Performance* (published by The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development out of Paris):

> With the growing recognition that literacy levels in the years ahead will intrinsically be tied to the capacity of firms and nations to respond to economic challenges, the opportunity exists in advanced countries for the formation of a broad coalition to support the expansion of literary training...Many employers who formerly regarded illiteracy as a minor worry have now begun to view the issue as critically linked to competitiveness. Many educators recognize that the best pedagogical methods often include, or even focus on, the working lives and economic goals of learners. (9)

The writer of the monograph claims that "many educators" have come to realize that the economic aspirations of would-be literates are essential to a better instructive method. But, despite this opening assertion, the introduction goes on to contradictorily lament that "educators continue to resist recasting their programs," "employers often still fail to match rhetoric with significant investment," and "governments still devote insufficient resources" (10) to literacy programs. The writer reveals that most such studies focus on persons already in the work force, and claims that a literacy gap "has been produced not by a fall in educational standards but by a rise in the literacy levels required of workers in modern economies" (10). Repeated reference is made to workers' "Everyday needs in civic life and in the workplace" (11), but these "needs" are only ever defined in terms of employers' needs. That private companies may end up being able to pick and choose between workers trained at public expense is not, I do not think, intended to be self-evident. In these and other sources I have consulted on illiteracy, prefaces and afterwords speak repeatedly of the lack of substantial or rapid results due to lack of funding, although supportive remarks by community leaders from many spheres are everywhere in evidence. The characters of Cameron Sheppard and Jacob Abraham Mensah perfectly depict this self-interested belief in a controlled spread of literacy--if each may have partially trained literates in their employ, or a very small number of high literates as specialists, then their own interests are well served.

Such writings dealing with illiteracy also show how agencies dedicated to increased literacy have repeatedly fallen far short of their targets due to a fundamental misunderstanding of the orality/literacy interface and to the flawed assumption that learning will follow from economic incentive. In a monograph published by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) in 1970 entitled *Functional Literacy,* the writers distance themselves from what is termed traditional literacy efforts, the sole aim of which (it is claimed) is to merely provide the illiterate with access to language training. UNESCO is adamant about disassociating literacy gained through occupational training from the more generalized methods of the teaching of reading and writing. What they call the "non-intensive" nature of traditional literacy work is condemned in favour of "Functional literacy (that), on the contrary, adopts an all-over approach, directly related to the acquisition of technical skills and knowledge of direct utility in a given environment" (9). The writer of the monograph makes it clear that major figures in business and financial circles have an ongoing interest in functional literacy as "a productive factor for development in industry, commerce, and agriculture" (9). Perhaps the most obvious objection one could make to this approach is simply to ask who is deciding what literacy, relating to what technical skills, are provided to persons in what "given environment"? In the African fiction of Margaret Laurence, and in the African context in general, Christian missionaries, practicing a form of cultural imperialism, taught reading and writing in order to better communicate and teach the divine "Word" and in order to supplant image-making as a means of spiritual and cultural expression. Economic interests in Africa were not concerned with literacy at all, or the spread of technical knowledge and skills, until it became advantageous to do so. Laurence was intent on laying bare the self-aggrandizing tendencies of missionary and corporate interests in Africa, a fact that Clara Thomas acknowledges when she says that the African characters are "economically delineated" (6).

The UNESCO monograph begins with an unsettling stubbornness on the part of René Maheu: "While the Experimental World Literacy Program has not so far produced such substantial and rapid results as had been expected, I am still convinced that the basic approach to it is the right one" (6). Maheu does not offer convincing reasons why the occupational approach to illiteracy should be maintained. He suggests a myriad number of techniques designed to define functional literacy through its practical applications. Examples include the following: a suggestion that traditional vocabulary be replaced by technical vocabulary, or, at the very least, that occupational courses immediately follow more [illegible] and literary ones; a call for the juxtaposing "of a number of socio-ethical lessons [illegible]d at changing the social outlook of the illiterates or their attitudes to work" (7) and the dissemination of technical texts as reading material in literacy courses. While Maheu refers to some of these approaches as "oversimplified," and admits their frequent inefficacy, he does not dismiss them but advocates their continued employment.

I think the problems inherent in these methods are readily apparent, perhaps nowhere more glaringly so than in the fact that the book nowhere mentions the possibility of further education once a person learns to read and write well enough to get a job. Presumably literacy is taught in a cursory, technical manner, and the learners then faithfully take up their station in the fields their pedagogical and corporate benefactors have prescribed. The phrase "socio-ethic lessons" is quite simply ominous in its vagueness and implications: would such programs advocate another period of wholesale importation of social and "ethical" attitudes in the service of corporate interests, the precepts of which are, as ever, in line with positivist, Western, and Christian world views which could further supplant indigenous beliefs? We see in the language of such writings an obvious extension of the viewpoints of those, such as Brother Lemon and Cameron Sheppard, who wish to see increased levels of literacy in Africa *in specific instances and for specific reasons.* The technical language the monograph suggests be taught in no way encourages or enables persons to consume and understand literary works or political

tracts except in the most elemental, linguistic way. It is clear that Maheu readily expects the newly literate to follow an economic course set for them: "It is not the aim of the Experimental World Literacy Program to make a vast number of illiterate people literate" (26). I suppose a counter argument to my concerns here might suggest that a robust economy would lead to greater prosperity all around, once the basic economic concerns of all citizens were addressed. But such a point would be moot only as increased levels of literacy and economic activity *have not become manifest under such an approach* . As the writers themselves are forced to admit,

> the disparity between the original objectives of the program and its achievements to date is undeniable...the program has fallen seriously behind schedule; the number of adult literates so far affected by the program is far short of the target; and by comparison with the original plans, not enough experimental work has been done on methods and materials. (25)

The fact is, within the broader critical realm, much research and experimental work *has* been done: the efforts of orality and literacy theorists involve a great many cogent analyses of the technology that is language and the state of mind that is oral, of the cognitive processes of each, and of how cross-cultural understanding in this regard is essential to any meaningful or efficacious exchange of information.

The full and speedy acquisition by the Cree-speaking peoples of Northern Canada of a set of written syllabics created by a Methodist missionary in 1841 provides a very illuminating example of the factors that facilitate the acquisition of literacy by an oral culture. The syllabics were designed to enable the Cree to write down and read their spoken tongue, as opposed to just speaking it. At the time, the Cree were an entirely oral culture, their means of subsistence and cultural operations not yet greatly affected by the extent to which they could or could not interact with European settlers in a written language. "The Cree appear to have achieved something closer to universal literacy in this syllabic script...without the benefit of the institutional supports we usually associate with literacy" (Bennet, Berry 90). The speed with which the Cree were able to understand and utilize a system of signs is a best-case scenario for those who advocate

increased literacy. It is important to acknowledge clearly the three factors responsible for the fast dissemination and absorption of the writing system in this instance: economic exigency was *not* involved, the new knowledge was not at first, or at any time, the privilege of an elite, and learning did not take place in an institution that reflected class inequities. In the fiction, Laurence depicts the exact opposite of this ideal learning scenario: almost all the African characters are desperate to improve or at least maintain their lot, literacy and the attendant technological superiority have ever been the privilege of an elite in their country, and the systems of learning in place are entirely predicated on class inequities.

Historically in Africa, in Laurence's fiction, and in many parts of the world today , it is the assumptions and biases of literate minds that often serve to impoverish illiterate or near illiterate persons by solidifying their low standing in a class structure, even in efforts designed to achieve the very opposite effect. The tragic misconceptions circulated during the 1960s about the supposedly low linguistic competence of lower-class black children in many parts of the United States provide a sobering example of such biases. The widespread misinformation in this case came of a failure to understand the language orientations the black children initially possessed; they were linguistically adept but unused to the rules of speaking favoured by white, middle to upper-class educators (Labov). Well-intentioned but fundamentally flawed programs that were set in place to increase literacy levels in this group (and presumably economic standing) often increased alienation and class disparities due to the fact that lower-class children were treated as though they were intellectually lacking, unable to respond to the demands set before them. In fact, they were capable, but responded in a manner indicating a high level of oral orientation.

Patricia M. Greenfield's 1968 article "Oral or Written Language: The Consequences of Cognitive Development in Africa, the United States and England," shows how the understanding of the differences between oral and literate communication

may be invaluable to pedagogical practice and general efforts to increase literacy rates. Greenfield begins by discussing how in oral cultures education is of a contextual nature. Learning takes place through demonstration and not through exercises involving often diagrammatic abstractions of a given object and situation. Children in traditional societies learn literally and figuratively "in the field," while those in literate milieus are given information outside of existential contexts. Greenfield relies heavily on the view that children's intellectual potential is determined before school is attended. Therefore, the degree to which parents are literate will bear greatly on how children go on to learn in an institutional setting. She cites various studies that show how mothers of lower socio-economic standing rely heavily on context-based instruction ("We put those there"), uttering sentences devoid of meaning for any audience not present. More formally educated mothers gave instructions that abstracted the elements in the situation into general principles that applied both to the test situation and possibly similar, future scenarios ("We put all plants in sunlight so they will grow"). A contextualized, empathetic and participatory learning system is contrasted with a decontextualized and abstract approach. It is Greenfield's contention that "the habits of speech and thought associated with an oral culture can exist along with context-independent ones and, ideally, can be used interchangeably as situational demands require" (176). Such a pedagogical approach--one that accepts, understands, and incorporates the habits of the oral mind--would have saved thousands of Africans the agony of a "cold turkey" approach to cognitive transition wherein the very means by which a mind interprets the world must be overturned in order to seek a new approach, a task often attempted with little or no guidance. Such is the nature of Adamo's dark, of Kofi's and Godman's fear, and of Nathaniel's tortured suspension between two ways of being.

In his essay "A Plea For Research On Lay Literacy," Ivan Illich states his concerns about

> those trends that make of education a pressing need rather than a gift of gratuitous pleasure...the traces that schooling leaves in the mindset of its

> participants...pupils (who) were deemed to acquire some "education"--which the school was deemed to monopolize--and which was deemed necessary to make pupils into valuable citizens, each knowing at which class level he was dropped out from this "preparation for life"...(and the fact that) School appeared as the worldwide stage on which the hidden assumptions of economic progress were being acted out. (30, 31, 32).

In the trials of Nathaniel Amegbe are represented the disappointments and aspirations of those Africans who, lining up like supplicants, seek the benefits promised by an obtrusive economic establishment. What they must contend with are the "hidden assumptions" of an imperial force convinced of its own racial, material, and cultural superiority, and motivated by an unflagging will to self-aggrandizement. Since I have already made extensive reference to*This Side Jordan*, what follows is a final, condensed analysis of the oral/literate interface in this novel, and the depiction of the birth of neo-imperialism in the African context.

In the first chapter, European and African /men and women sit in a nightclub called "Weekend in Wyoming." Racial tensions are immediately manifest as Johnnie Kestoe first exhibits his simultaneous attraction and repulsion for African women when he dances with Charity Donkor. The Europeans at the table express their disdain for Africans, calling them children, and Victor Edusei, an African journalist, watches Johnnie closely, feeling an intense hatred. The musicians and dancers enjoy the highlife music:

> It was modern. It was new. To hell with the ritual dance, the drums with voices as ancient as the forest....And yet the old rhythms still beat strongly in this highlife in the center of Accra, amid the taxi horns, just as a few miles away in Jamestown or Labadi, they pulsed through the drums while the fetish priestess with ash-smeared cheeks whirled to express the unutterable....Into the brash contemporary patterns of this Africa's fabric were woven symbols old as the sun king, old as the oldest continent. (2)

When Johnnie rejoins his table, the other Europeans are quick to castigate him, offering advice as to how he should behave:

> "A chap is seen with an African woman, and soon his own servants and clerks get cheeky--won't work--laugh behind his back. Even your little flurry tonight--your own boys will know by morning. Bush telegraph. It doesn't do. (6)

It is heavily ironic that Bedford here acidly casts aspersions on the Africans' quickness to spread word of a whiteman's dancing with an African woman. After all, he is responding expeditiously to Johnnie's indiscretion, and it will be long before morning that all concerned know of Johnnie's actions and that social coercion is employed to prevent further outrages. ("Bush telegraph" represents the first in a long line of disparaging remarks by British characters aimed at African methods of communication.) James displays the British disdain for the indigenous person's impulse to improve his or her lot within the new class structure:

> "When I first came here," James was saying, "insolence was practically unheard of. Even today, the bush African is all right. If his belly's full, that's all he's worried about. But when they move to the cities--look at them! They get cheeky as the devil, and every boat-boy thinks he has a right to a Jaguar. That's Free-Dom for you." (7)

The irony is again heavy, for these Europeans abroad would seek to pull the ladder up behind them because they themselves are faring badly in the new class structure. They display exactly the same ambitions and frustrations as the Africans do. The chapter closes with Victor Edusei hugging the illiterate Charity and whispering to himself in English, "You were right, mister Whiteman...but it's not for you. No, sir. Not this time" (15). Charity, Victor's future wife, and the prostitute that Johnnie later abuses are both symbols of a violated Africa. Victor proclaims in the language of the interlopers that "this time"--during a new era of colonizer/colonized conflagration--things will be different.

A page later, literacy proclaims itself once more. At the start of Chapter Two, Nathaniel's school (likened to an "old unburied corpse" [17] to suggest the bygone usefulness of an instrument of colonial servitude) has a sign above the door that reads,

FUTURA ACADEMY
--THE FUTURE IS YOURS!--
J. A. MENSAH'S SECONDARY SCHOOL

"Out of the (lavatory) doorway spilled scraps of newspaper, excreta-soiled," and we discover Nathaniel considering a letter from his sister Kwaale who is writing to ask for money:

> Kwaale was not literate, so the letter had been written by a semi-literate scribe. But under the garbled flowering phrases the shrewd personality of his eldest sister showed like thorns thrusting up through a cluster of sickly-sweet cactus blossoms. (17)

Future, literate Ghanaian prosperity, alluded to in the sign, the excreta-soiled words of the newspaper bespeaking the uselessness of a limited literacy, the tenacious oral character of Nathaniel's sister thrusting up through the printed word requesting a share in the fruits of literate employment in the city, all combine to bring into high relief early in the novel the technology which simultaneously promises prosperity and entrenches class hierarchies in Accra society.

The school is depicted in a manner befitting an institution which facilitates only African failure. The knowledge offered there is limited and is more effective as a means of socializing persons in a way beneficial to the British:

> "What's the use?" Lamptey said candidly. "The stuff I teach don't make sense anyway. So I just tell them to memorize everything....You know what we took today, Nathaniel?"
> "What?"
> "Wordsworth." Lamptey pulled a mock-earnest face. "'Stern Daughter of the Voice of God"--what kind of stuff is that? Some god--his voice can make a daughter? What you think of that? It's crazy, man. I tell you, it got no sense."
> Nathaniel laughed despite himself.
> "So what did you tell them?"
> "I told them this God is a very clever fellow, and they should memorize the poem and never mind what it means." (20)

Learning the high, canonical poetry of Wordsworth by rote is a ludicrous act within the African context; the pun is upon us--what is the worth of words? Memorizing poems devoid of meaning for them is an exercise that will least enable Ghanaians to dictate their future prospects. That any would memorize meaningless words by rote suggests a residual oral impulse to attribute magico-religious properties to the written word, words that do not carry in their content the means to prosperity, but the technical nature of

which represents an advantage that is seen as a way to communicate with any powers that be the wishes of the one whom the words serve. (Nathaniel himself displays this impulse towards Western technology as he believes that if his wife gives birth in a white man's hospital it will be a good omen.) As literary art and as the vernacular of commerce, the English language is an ideal to be reached for, but the teaching of it in Accra serves to socialize Africans in a specific way. They are meant to revere the discourses of the dominant culture, but they are not given the means by which to understand fully that culture and thereby be able to effect change in their favour. Brian Doyle attributes the success of English (as an internationally spoken and studied language) to a factor which he sees as characteristic of wider patterns of cultural hegemony: "it is the capacity of English studies to articulate systematically a symbolic rather than theoretical totality that has enabled the discipline to occupy a central role in sustaining 'national culture' [both in Britain and abroad]" (7).

We read that "Classes at Futura Academy were conducted in English, but the masters out of class often spoke to one another in the vernacular, Ga or Twi or Fante. But not with Jacob Abraham. With him they always spoke meticulous English" (23). English is the official language of the school. Mensah insists upon this. Thus, the speaking of African dialects is a subversive but controlled expression. It is highly ironic that men like Nathaniel and Victor, persons who could communicate in several African dialects, in addition to Pidgin and proper English, could in any way be treated by Europeans as low literates. Their demonstrated linguistic comprehension is far greater than that of the British administrators. Nonetheless, the English language and the cultural institutions which facilitate its spread keep those people such as Nathaniel and his students within predetermined grooves of social mobility:

> Nathaniel wondered if he managed to teach these citizens of the new Ghana anything at all. He felt sometimes as though he were talking to himself....He did not have the gift of spoken words--only of imagined words, when he made silent speeches to himself. (21)

Nathaniel is revealed to be a man awash in a partial and useless literacy, one who has lost the oral capacity of his traditional society. While Nathaniel's school bears all manner of imprints and semiotic markings--it is "glued with paper bills proclaiming funeral rites or this week's dances at Teshie and Labadi, chalk-scrawled, chicken-scratched, urinated against by humans and dung-splattered by goats"--

> The stamp of the mission was deep on him.
> His father. Kyreema, Drummer to a chief. He who knew the speech of the Ntumpane and the Fontomfrom, the sacred talking drums...would not be acceptable to God. That had seemed very clear at the time. Had not the mission priests taught it? "I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God." (27, 28)

The declamation in the Scriptures of a jealous God that, as Postman points out, comes to Africa in the written word, demands of Nathaniel his whole spiritual devotion, while standing opposite is the figure of his father who represents the gods of his traditional upbringing. His father was a great drummer, one who in life expressed his religious conviction through a speech surrogate that, as Ong explains, exists quite opposite to the spoken word, developed as it is within an oral economy of thought and expression, exemplifying and exaggerating the characteristics of the oral lifeworld. Nathaniel thinks back to his father's funeral and to how the dirges came back to him "as though he had heard them every day of his life" (29). When Nathaniel attends the funeral service, he is drawn through the experience of his ear back into the ritual and the formulaic quality of his old life. He "shouted his confused despair into the ancient formula," and such is the intensity with which he does so that the village elders who had suspected Nathaniel of forgetting his heritage are impressed: " 'They have not stolen your soul,' the uncles repeated, satisfied" (30). As critics have frequently noted, Nathaniel is a man unable to exist in either the past or the present. But integral to this ontology, to this representation of suspension between two different conceptual states, is the oral/literate interface.

Contrasted with the dilapidated school is the equally outdated textiles building that "dated from the days when whitemen in the tropics never ventured forth without solar topee and flannel spinepad, and in their dwelling-places barricaded themselves against the

marauding sun" (33). Johnnie and James observe two new supervisors who are "both miserable in their forced and feeble attempt to achieve the bellow voice of the sahib" (34). The supervisors cannot bring themselves to behave in a way that James would approve of, one that involves a constant berating of African workers. The neo-imperialism that takes shape in the novel advises devious, superficial appeasement over outright conflagration. James, firmly rooted in a bygone era, tellingly blames what he perceives as a fall in administrative standards on increased speed in promotions. Promotions, the granting or the withholding of, are a powerful means of economic manipulation. In this chapter, we see Bedford reading "*The Illustrated London News*" and telling Johnnie, who has apologized for being "a bit of a new broom," not to worry--"It'll happen by itself, quite soon enough" (36, 37). He refers to Johnnie's being able to pick up on the rules governing proper and improper behavior in the firm (such is Bedford's confidence in the old manner of socialization taking place easily). It does, indeed, take place in Johnnie's case, but is soon supplanted by the approach taken by the new breed of British imperialist as advocated by Cameron Sheppard.

Johnnie has his first run-in with Victor Edusei, wherein the African accuses Johnnie of having designs on Charity:

> For an instant Johnnie could only look blank. He had expected English, or, at most, the heavily accented, stilted phraseology of the semi-educated African. But this man's speech had in it more of Oxford than Accra. (38)

Like Danso in "The Merchant of Heaven," Victor is highly aware of the dynamic between the dominant and the subjected forms of discourse of the two cultures and the language that mediates the norms of agreement and contention between both. Victor, quite aware of his ability to gain a hearing with Johnnie by speaking the Queen's English, is also aware of the imperialist motivation of business enterprises in his country. Nathaniel believes that Victor (who has a degree from the London School of Economics) "had never made use of his advantages" (51). Nathaniel expects his friend to do as he did--take up a position in a British-influenced economy that is commensurate with his level of attained

literacy and learning. Instead, Victor works as a journalist on a little-known, hand-set newspaper, which was "small, vituperative and--except for Victor's copy--largely ungrammatical. Even Victor describes it as "bush" (51). Whereas Nathaniel accepts the economic standing assigned him, Victor does not, and where Nathaniel fantasizes about making love to an educated city girl, Victor chooses to marry and champion the illiterate Charity--in each instance, Victor symbolically chooses what is essentially African. At the end of the novel, when the reader discovers that Victor has all along been working through his connections in London to gain a high-level administrative position in the textiles firm (and, from that vantage, to speed the process of Africanization), we realize that he, more than any other character, is able to understand the economic forces operating on his people.

Nathaniel, never gaining this crucial awareness, is condemned to suffer at the hands of those more capable:

> But the whiteman was looking at him suspiciously.
> "What school is that?"
> All at once Nathaniel felt defeated.
> "One of the secondary schools," he said.
> "Oh?" The expression was insulting in its implications. (43-44)

Nathaniel "was educated, but he was not so much educated that he had left them (his traditional family) far behind....Most of them were illiterate, shrewd and naive, suspicious and gullible" (45). We read that when Nathaniel reaches home, he is relieved to speak with his wife in Twi, and that as he approaches his house, he notices the tailor's sign which reads, "YIAMOO TAILOR--All For Mod, Dad & Kid....Nathaniel sometimes wondered who had written the sign, but he never offered to correct it, for it was Yiamoo's greatest pride" (46). Upon arriving home, his wife Aya immediately engages him in an argument about her fear of having their baby in a white hospital (she would prefer to have it in her native village). Immediately, Nathaniel's literate and Aya's oral mindsets are represented to the reader: "Why do we become educated , if we do the same things as before?" Nathaniel yells at her, and then when he speculates aloud on the possible death

of the child during labour, Aya replies, attributing power to the spoken word: "Nathaniel," she whimpered, "if I lose it now, it will be because you said--you said the things that should not be spoken" (48, 49).

When Victor visits their home, he bitterly inveighs against the pretensions of Mensah and his brass plaques and against "These damn anthropologists" (51, 53). Shortly after, Laurence links the parallelism that structures her novel with the orality/literacy motif. After establishing the main African characters' relation to literacy, she does so with the character of Johnnie Kestoe. Johnnie talks to Miranda at one point, reminiscing about an old man, Janowicz, who had influenced him as a young man:

> "You haven't told me very much," Miranda said. "Only that you went to work for Janowicz when you were fourteen, toward the end of the war, and that he taught you a lot--gave you books, made you practice proper speech, started you off at night school--"
> "I don't owe Jano anything." (55)

It is highly significant that Johnnie does not wish to acknowledge any debts in the matter of his acquisition of the technology that so allows him to occupy a position of power in Africa. Later that night, as Johnnie tries to sleep, we read that, "In the distance, the drums sounded. They would keep on all night. These were not the drums of highlife....These were the old drums, played out under some frayed casuarina tree." (56) As he listens to this sounding of African otherness, an ancient rhythmic rite that sounds a protest in the black of night against the advent of a foreign language spoken in the light of day, Johnnie ponders the connection between sign and signifier and the relationship between language--that is, the conceptual mechanism by which we process and express our view of ourselves and of our world--and the private, intimate conception of self:

> In the limbo between reality and sleep, thoughts merged and melted and changed. Magic symbols--a rune, a spell, a charm--the thing that made him different from any other man on earth. His name. John Kestoe. What proved identity more than a name? If you had a name, you must exist. I am identified; therefore, I am. (57)

In chapter four, Mensah is dressed in an impressive Kente cloth, "For the benefit of a wealthy but illiterate cocoa-farmer" (61). Mensah hopes that the impressiveness of

his visual appearance will be associated by the illiterate with the power of literacy. In this chapter, Laurence clearly lays out for the reader the hopelessness for most Africans of rising up in the hierarchy of literacy to a point where they can obtain good jobs and begin to influence the shaping of their own society. As Mensah castigates the teacher for not holding his students' interest by presenting--orally--engaging lectures,

> Nathaniel wondered where that place could possibly be, the place for the semi-educated, the boys who failed and did not know why they failed, the hopeful applicants for engineering and medical scholarships who did not realize they must be able to do more than simple arithmetic, and could not write a business letter without making a dozen mistakes.
>
> Because they had more education than the majority in this country, they wanted more and significant jobs, jobs for which they were not qualified. The past was dead for them, but the future could never be realized. Nathaniel felt a despairing kinship with them. (64)

Nathaniel feels such a kinship because he, too, is not educated enough to realize his dreams of becoming a better-paid teacher who can effectively teach African history. Unlike Victor, he possesses neither a degree bestowed by a British institution nor a breadth of social understanding. If boys with such a low level of education are more learned than the majority of Ghanaians, then it is clear to whom the majority of high-paying jobs will go and to what country people must most often turn for education and technical expertise. In his anguish, Nathaniel gets into another fight with his wife, during which Aya cries out, "Why did you not marry someone who could read?" (69). Shortly after, his mother-in-law implores him to return to the village. She does so after trying to engage him in a traditional exchange of proverbs, after declaring aloud that she wanted "to hear my grandchildren's voices" (73).

In Chapter Five, as Johnnie walks through the city, we read that "Africa began in various ways to taunt his knowing eye" (86). It is the highly spatializing sensory modality of sight, that organ which most dictates the British dualistic world view, that sees the visual as the major cultural dominant in Western consciousness, that Johnnie Kestoe repeatedly employs when surveying the African women he is attracted to. Charity Donkor, his manservant's second wife, the prostitute named Emerald, and in this chapter,

the Syrian's daughter are characters who function as symbols of Africa and who are taken in by an imperial eye: "She was tall and sleek, and her dark slanted eyes, half closed seemed to convey her knowledge of men, a knowledge both amused and lustful. She smiled at him, and preened a little, her apple-breasts showing under the tight cloth" (87). We meet the Syrian named Saleh who, like Victor, has understood the nature of the power structure in Ghana. He declares to Johnnie Kestoe that it is in his will that his two sons will be educated in England. He recognizes a prestigious, post-secondary education as a ticket to prosperity. It is a written communiqué from London that enrages James Thayer with its outlining of the company's policy of Africanization, prompting him to caper "in the air in a weird ballet of rage" (91), and to rage against the whole process:

> "The Firm wants to keep on the right side of the Africans...Oh--as a publicity gesture, it's understandable....You'd hardly believe how small it was when I came here...We had only one clerk, and he could hardly write his own name." (91, 92)

In chapter six, Nathaniel's family brings all its pressure to bear on him to return to the ways of his traditional village. His uncle Adjei arrives to offer him the chance to be clerk to the village chief. Adjei asks him,

> "Try me again, Nathaniel. You say Nana Kweku is a good man, and yet you refuse to work for him. Why? I am perhaps a little deaf these past years. That part was not quite clear to me--"
> "Because I would end by hating him, if I worked for him," Nathaniel snapped. "Oh--many clerks of chiefs despise their masters, make no mistake about it! I'd have to watch him, every day, every day, not able to read or even write his own name, not knowing anything outside his little province, but still able to command." (102)

Nathaniel here, as in many instances, equates high literacy with authority. So frequent are his castigations of himself and others through the use of explicit references to literacy that it is surprising they have escaped critical notice. Nathaniel knows he cannot achieve a higher level of learning than the one he now possesses, which is why he says to his uncle that he is a man caught between yesterday and today, between an irretrievable past and an unreachable vision of the future. It is this knowledge which makes him a tragic figure.

In her discussion of the novel, Clara Thomas states that "Several scenes show us a series of Nathaniel's humiliations, misunderstandings and cross-purpose failures in communication outside his family circle" (101). She goes on to identify several revealing passages that illuminate certain themes, but does not realize that the failure of communication itself is a theme. Africans, cut off from their past, must navigate through a confusing world of unstated assumptions and cryptic rules for communication. Laurence extends this theme to include her European characters. We read in chapter seven that "Bedford's world was dead, and he did not know the language or currency of the new" (124), and we read later that his wife Cora will see her future "destroyed by a storm she had never foreseen and would never comprehend" (130). It is not that the *reasons* shaping neo-imperialist approaches are new and incomprehensible. These have ever been explicit--Sheppard and Thayer, different as they are, are nonetheless both resolutely imperialist, numb to matters of African well-being, and this position of theirs arises out of what is, quite simply, racism. It is "the language or currency of the new" (124) that baffles, that is seen to be manipulated in the works to the advantage of economically ambitious persons and enterprises such as the textile branch and Jacob's school. Laurence, here as elsewhere, directly aligns "language" with the idea of "currency." The British government offers independence and a role within the Commonwealth, while British business implements a superficial Africanization program, the costs of which will be offset by taking advantage of the hierarchy of literacy.

Nathaniel attends a cocktail party given by an American, Eric Banning, "who was studying the drum language. Nathaniel had forgotten most of the things the Kyreema his father had taught him as a boy" (145). No one speaks with Nathaniel, and he realizes this is due to the fact that he so obviously is attempting to appear European, and is therefore uninteresting to the people in attendance. He imagines that if his father were here "among these people, his eyes cold and amused" (145), people would find the old drummer fascinating and flock to speak with him. Repeatedly, Nathaniel cannot establish

the needs of his heart and assume the cultural role he feels most comfortable with. To attract European interest in himself, he must appear genuinely African, but to maintain a livelihood, he must behave as a European. Nathaniel here represents the torn psyche of the emerging Ghanaian nation.

The engine of Western technological progress, and the bifurcated status of an Africa that wants to gain the prosperity of the Western world without losing traditional identity, finds a fitting metaphor in Chapter Nine. As Nathaniel is later walking, Johnnie Kestoe and Miranda call to him to help push their stalled car. Nathaniel fears that the local African merchants will see him "push a car like a bush-boy" (150) at an Englishman's command. He refuses, and later regrets his action, as he "realized that if Johnnie had seen a European acquaintance...the European would have done it. Unquestioningly, as an equal, with no thought of insult" (151). Nathaniel cannot understand, on the one hand, the "anthropologically-inclined" tourist mentalities possessed by Miranda and Banning on the one hand, and the disdainful, appropriative men like Johnnie Kestoe on the other. The impulses of each find a bizarre manifestation together in the person of his boss, Mensah, who also declares the importance of African culture while suppressing her people. As Nathaniel moves through the market later with Miranda, we see him return confusingly to the flashpoint of difference, Laurence's strongest leitmotif: he says of the market people that "They could not read, but they could read him or anyone" (156).

Nathaniel begins to remember songs, ones that represent the two extremes of his situation:

> *--Black man, black man, come down from the trees,*
> *Show how you pound those typewriter keys;*
>
> *-Nathaniel, plant the koko yam,*
> *Nathaniel, plant the water yam,*
> *Nathaniel, plant the koko yam,*
> *And never wonder why.* (163)

The former is almost a high-life lyric, a sardonic and knowing reference to the racist view of the African as inferior monkey, fit to serve only as clerical staff. The latter is of a traditional form that depicts how a member of an oral culture needs to remain close to the workings of the intimate lifeworld. But in this last, there is a crying out against an absence, an inability to ever wonder why things are the way they are and to effectively learn the answer.

In Chapter Twelve, at the climactic moment where Johnnie confronts Nathaniel with his knowledge of the bribes, the unbridgeable gap between their perspectives is alluded to in the words of the characters themselves:

> Then the sweat broke out on Nathaniel, fear made visible.
> "Please--please, sir," and through his panic he despised himself as much as if he had knelt, "please--if you would allow me to explain--"
> The whiteman leaned across the desk.
> "You couldn't explain," he said softly, venomously. Not to me." (207)

Later, as Nathaniel attempts to drink away his sorrows, he thinks,

> Tomorrow, tomorrow. Tomorrow was now. The lifted voice of the telephone, the voice of the whiteman speaking destruction, one man's worth crushed casually into the nearest wastepaper basket. (222)

His bitterness towards being defined by literacy is clear. As Johnnie Kestoe rises from the floor of the nightclub after Nathaniel has pushed him to the ground,

> some obscure discipline, some awareness of time and place, held Johnnie Kestoe back, even as it had held Nathaniel.
> "No," the whiteman said deliberately. "I've got a better way. This'll clinch the case against you. Assault. It's all I needed. Thanks very much." (223)

The European here threatens the application of the complex, written precedents of Western legal practice, knowing that it is all he needs to best his African counterpart.

By the close of the novel, Nathaniel has not resolved the nature of his dilemma, caught as he is between the literate, city life and a traditional, oral world. But he does come to some level of acceptance of the two forces operating upon him. In one of his interior monologues he says to himself,

> --My God is the God of my own soul, and my own speech is in my mouth, and my home is here, here, here, my home is here at last. (275)

Nathaniel feels at ease, glad that he may own his speech and be able, spatially and spiritually, to locate his home. His inward affirmation is much the same as Kofi's as the boy stands atop the bridge. Nathaniel does decide to stay in the city and continue teaching at the school. On the final page, as Aya puts their baby to her breast, Nathaniel "got out the new curriculum and picked up his pen," then says inwardly to his son, "Joshua. I beg you. Cross Jordan, Joshua." Nathaniel here hopes that the next generation of Africans will be able to come to terms with the European influence, with the hierarchy of literacy (perhaps deconstructed by this "new curriculum"?), and with the irreconcilable calls from both the past and the future.

Conclusion: Margaret Laurence Wrote Africa Speaking--A Personal Note

> "Writing introduces division and alienation, but a higher unity as well. It intensifies the sense of self and fosters more conscious interaction between persons. Writing is consciousness raising."
>
> --Walter Ong

> "We are capable of great communication and love and very often fall short of this."
>
> --Margaret Laurence

Margaret Laurence's African fiction represents one of this country's most concerted efforts by a writer to reach out and commune not only with the cultural other, but with the writers and readers of her own culture. By offering up fiction so intimately based on her African experiences, Laurence takes with her to Africa a reader who, in turn, also discovers that "the strangest glimpses you may have of any creature in the distant lands will be those you catch of yourself" (*The Prophet's Camel Bell* 10). To engage oneself in the African short stories and novel is to enter into a process of self-evaluation wherein one is compelled to place under the microscope one's own cultural biases, assumptions and possible misconceptions. Such is the power of a writer who so rigorously examines and quite lays bare the processes by which people interpret their world.

Laurence herself was never a member of an oral culture. Even though she ever cherished the experience of the ear--by advocating to young writers that they listen to the speech of others, by listening to her characters as they took shape in her thoughts, and by seeking, as translator and critic, to bring more fully onto the world stage the African writings so deeply bound up in oral experience--her highly literate upbringing was nonetheless characterized by the same forces that shape writing itself. Despite a long

association with an oral culture, she realized early in her career that the effort to understand another people in any absolute sense was an impossibility.

However, like Nathaniel and Mammii Ama, Laurence ultimately shows faith, faith in the rightness of the effort to seek an identification with human beings of markedly different cultures, and then turn back to one's own culture to see what has been learned. The extent to which Laurence succeeded in her bid for cross-cultural understanding is reflected in Chinua Achebe's declared exclusion of her from his well-known condemnation of neo-colonialist attitudes and in the words of critics such as Clara Thomas who say that "Every so often Canadians need to remind themselves that, to Africans, Margaret Laurence would be a respected fiction writer, critic and translator even if she had never written one of her Manawaka works" (93). The extent to which this success is mirrored in the African fiction itself is best confirmed by contrasting her cultural portrayals with the studies carried out by theorists of orality and literacy, persons who have studied extensively the same social phenomena that Laurence did, and who, in an overwhelming number of instances, have drawn the same conclusions. The interpretive utility of these theories should, by now, be evident, and their usefulness in understanding fiction by other Canadian writers is promising and largely unexplored. Works by those such as Rudy Wiebe that depict primary oral cultures native to Canada and Thomas King that comically portray the residual orality of present-day native cultures would be brightly illuminated by the theories I have outlined and applied above.

Laurence begins her final work, the memoir, with the words "I have heard it said," once more proclaiming at the outset of a piece that the experience of the ear is integral to humanness and to the processes of reading and writing that so often appeal to the experience of the eye. It seems appropriate that Laurence's autobiography is structured around the stories of four mothers (she includes herself), the dance of life referred to in the title being equated with the cycle of life she says is so closely presided over by mothers. We are only pre-Euclidian, pre-linguistic for a very short time. In infancy, as

soon as we realize we are separate from our mother, truly alone and entering into an existence where reaching out to the other is the only way to defy solitude, we are encouraged to attach to her a linguistic construct: ma-ma. We are truly creatures of language, be it spoken or written.

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